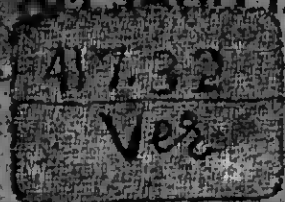


development of script in ancient kamarupa

dr. t.p.verma

AM SAHITYA SABHA



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ANUNDORAM BOROOAH MEMORIAL LECTURES

DEVELOPMENT
OF SCRIPT
IN
ANCIENT KAMRUPA

Dr. T. P. VERMA

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ASAM SAHITYA SABHA

DEVELOPMENT OF SCRIPT IN ANCIENT KAMRUPA

—Lectures, organised by Asam Sahitya Sabha in
memory of 125th birth anniversary of the great scholar
Anundoram Borooah, delivered by Dr. T. P. Verma

of Banaras Hindu University,

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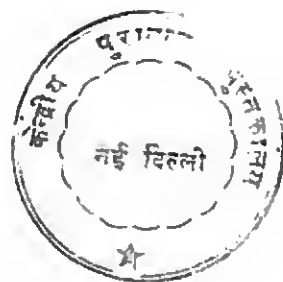
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उत्पन्न नई दिल्ली

केन्द्रीय पुरातत्व पुस्तकालय

Contents

1. PREFACE05
2. FOREWORD09
3. TEXT			
(i) INTRODUCTION	1-
(ii) THE BACK-GROUND		...	18
(iii) THE ASAMIYA SCRIPT		...	29
(iv) TABLES	46
4. APPENDIX			
(i) QUESTIONS & ANSWERS		...	70



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ABBREVIATIONS :

- E. I. *Epigraphia Indica*, Published by the Chief Epigraphist of India, Mysore.
- H. P. M. B. *History and Palaeography of Mauryan Brahmi*, C. S. Upasak, 1960, Nalanda.
- I. P. *Indian Palaeography*, G. Bühler, Reprinted in. Indian Studies, Past and Present, Vol. I. No. 1, October, 1959.
- I. P. *Indian Palaeography*, A. H. Dani, 1963, Oxford.
- I. P. *Indian Palaeography*, R. B. Pandeya, 1957, (2nd Ed.), Varanasi.
- J. A. S. B. *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Calcutta.
- J. A. S. B. (Letters) *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Letters*, Calcutta.
- J. B. O. R. S. *Journal of Bihar and Orissa Research Society*, Patna.
- J. N. S. I. *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India*, Varanasi.
- K. S. *Kamrupa Sasanavali*, P. N. Bhattacharya, 1931, Varanasi.
- P. B. S. *Palaeography of Brahmi Script in North India*, T. P. Verma, 1971, Varanasi.

PREFACE

Not only Assam, but India is proud of her illustrious son Anundoram Borooah, the great Sanskritist who within the short span of his life made invaluable contributions to the field of Sanskrit studies and 'has own imperishable name in the annals of Indian Sanskrit Research.' To him, in his own words, "Sanskrit is dearer than any other language. Its music has charms which no words can express. Its capability of representing every form of human thought in most appropriate language is probably not rivalled, certainly not surpassed by and other language." Born in May 1850, at North Gauhati, Anundoram passed the Entrance Examination of the Calcutta University before he was fourteen and simultaneously 'he mastered and got by heart the whole of the immortal lexicon Amarkosh' under the guidance of his noble father Gargaram Mazindar Borooah 'Sadar-Amin', a post, equivalent to a modern Deputy Magistrateship.

Anundoram stood sixth in the First Class in the F. A. Examination from Presidency College in 1866 and stood third in the First Class in the B. A. Examination in 1869 of the Calcutta University. To quote Sir Gurudas Banerjee, "The First year class of the Presidency College of 1865 was a splendid one containing many very brilliant students, and Mr. Borooah was unquestionably the brightest of this bright band of young students."

Anundoram, winning by open competition the Gilchrist Scholarship and State Scholarship as well, proceeded to England in 1869 and passed the I. C. S. Examination in 1870, and then passed the B. Sc. Examination of the London University. To quote Dr. S. K. Bhuyan, "he was the first Assamese graduate, the first Assamese Barrister, and the first Assamese civilian." After coming back from Europe in 1872, he was appointed Assistant Commissioner of the District of Sibsagar, Assam, and after a year he was transferred to Bengal where he spent the rest of his life in higher administrative posts. On 19th January, 1889, at the age of only 38 years and 8 months, Anundoram Borooah passed away keeping his monumental and nonperishable works behind him.

It is simply beyond imagination that these voluminous, strenuous and scholastic works were completed within the span of a twelve-year period of a life of 38 years only.

To mark the 125th birth anniversary of this great scholar, Asam Sahitya Sabha, the premier cultural organisation of the State of Assam found no other way but to organise a memorial lecture in its own humble way. It is a pleasure for me to recollect that the idea of organising a lecture in memory of this great son of Assam, came to my mind in the month of June 1974, amidst a tea-talk in my residence. Accordingly I made out a plan and selected the topic "Making of Sanskrit Lexicon". But in 1974, when the 'script problem' peered its head in Assam, no book of comprehensive study of Assamese script could be found expecting the pioneer little book by Sarbeswar Katak and the portion of the 'Growth of the Asamiyā Language' by Late Dimbeswar Neog. This has provoked to change the topic of the lecture to "Indian Palaeography, with special reference to the script as developed in ancient Kamrupa from 5th Century onwards." Accordingly the plan was submitted before the august Executive body of Asam Sahitya Sabha and the body in its sitting on 11th May, 1975 was pleased to recommend the same. At first, it was thought to hold the function either in New Delhi or in Calcutta. But in honour of the goodwishes of many, lastly it was decided to hold it in Gauhati on 27th & 28th October 1975. But whom to approach to read an authoritative paper on the subject? The name of Dr. T. P. Verma of the Deptt. of A. I. H. C. & Archaeology of the University of Banaras came to my mind, though the name is not so familiar in Assam. Dr. Verma's field of specialisation covers Palaeography and Numismatics and he has been contributing good many papers and books on the subject. I convey our heartfelt thanks to Dr. Verma, on behalf of Asam Sahitya Sabha, for his kind consent to deliver three lectures on the subject covering upto 12th century from the early 5th century. We hope Dr. Verma would complete his survey upto atleast 18th century, and this would certainly throw new light on the subject.

The Memorial-Lecture-function was held on 27 & 28 October, 1975. In the morning session on 27th October, Sri H. N. Talukdar, the then Education Minister of Assam, delivered the inaugural speech and Prof. Atul Ch. Hazarika, ex-president,

Asam Sahitya Sabha unveiled the portrait of Anundoram Borooah in a dignified atmosphere. Dr. Satyendranath Sarma, President, Asam Sahitya Sabha, in his Presidential address, the gist of which can be found here in the 'Foreword', stressed much on the study of the subject to explore and discover the unknown aspects and facts in the scientific way and means. Sri Sarat Chandra Sinha, Chief Minister, Assam, was also kind enough to attend and deliver his speech in the concluding session on 28th October 1975. I, on behalf of Asam Sahitya Sabha like to express here our thanks and gratitude to all.

It is worth mentioning here that during the last 58 years of Asam Sahitya Sabha, this is the second memorial lecture, organised by the Sabha. The first was organised in 1947, and Dr. S. K. Chatterjee, the renowned Indian Scholar delivered his lectures under the name 'Kirata Janakṛti', a subject on Indo-Mongoloid influence in Assam.

We hope, this may be the humble beginning of the proper study of Assamese script and our Researchers and students would come forward for doing more extensive and intensive works on the subject.

Lastly, I must thank Nabajiban Press for taking the responsibility to print out the book within a very short time.

January 26, 1976
Dibrugarh University
Assam.

Nagen Saikia
General Secretary
ASAM SAHITYA SABHA

FOREWORD

The Executive Committee of Asam Sahitya Sabha, in its meeting held on the 11th of May, 1975, adopted a resolution to institute a course of lectures on a subject of Indology in the memory of one of the most distinguished son of Assam, the late Anundoram Borooah, a Sanskrit scholar of international repute. The subject chosen for first course of the lectures was the origin and development of Indian script with particular reference to the growth of Assamese script. Dr. T. P. Verma, a scholar on Indian palaeography was invited to deliver the first series of lectures and he was kind enough to accept the invitation and accordingly delivered the memorial lectures in three sessions on October 27 & 28, 1975. The lectures are now being published by Asam Sahitya Sabha in the book form to facilitate further study in the subject.

It would be very much pertinent here to give a brief life-sketch of the distinguished scholar in whose memory the lectures were instituted and delivered. The late Anundoram Borooah was born at North Gauhati in 1850 in a traditionally cultured and distinguished Kayastha family. After completing his school education in Gauhati he proceeded to Calcutta for higher study as there was no facility for higher study in Assam at that time. He stood sixth in the first class in F. A. examination in 1866 and two years later passed B. A. examination securing third position in the first class from the Calcutta University. Having obtained the State scholarship and the Gilchrist scholarship he, then, proceeded to England for higher pursuit of learning and also to compete for the Indian Civil Service. He passed the I. C. S. examination in 1870 and in due course qualified for the Bar from the Middle Temple. He also obtained the B. Sc. Degree from the University of London. Sri Surendranath Banerjee, Ramesh Chandra Dutt, Biharilal Gupta and a few other distinguished sons of India were his class mates during his college days. It may be mentioned in this connection that Anundoram was the first Assamese graduate, the first Assamese Barrister and the first and only Assamese Civilian who successfully competed the I. C. S. examination.

Barooah returned to India in 1872 and served as a civilian in various capacities in Assam and Bengal to the entire satisfaction of the Government. He earned popularity and respect from the people for his sympathetic understanding of their problems and gained appreciation from the Government for his meritorious service. But Anundoram barooah is still remembered neither for his brilliant academic career, nor for being a member of the Indian civil Service. He is chiefly remembered today and will be remembered by the future generation for his solid contribution to the Indological studies. In spite of heavy burden of official responsibility associated with the duties and functions of a Civilian he did not allow his scholarly pursuit to be damped by official preoccupations and drudgeries. As a result, a few outstanding literary and research works were produced at a time when the study of Sanskrit literature on the scientific line was just initiated by the western scholars.

Barooah's *English-Sanskrit Dictionary* the first published work, appeared in three volumes between 1877 and 1880. To the second and third volumes of his dictionary, Barooah prefixed two other useful works, viz. *Higher Sanskrit Grammar* and *Ancient Geography of India*. He also critically edited and published during the same period the *Mahāvīracarita* of Bhavabhūti with a commentary named after his beloved brother Jānakirām Barooah. In his commentary on the *Mahāvīracarita*, he has given a few autobiographical informations at the end of every Act. He also critically edited Bhoja's *Sarasvatikanthābharanam*, a well-known work on rhetorics, Amarasimha's *Nāmaṅgānuśāsana* with the commentary of Kṣīrasvāmi and *Dhātukoṣa*, and *Dhātuvṛttisāra*. Barooah undertook a very ambitious project of compiling a comprehensive grammar of the Sanskrit language in twelve volumes of which Vol. X dealing with prosody and the Vol. III dealing with words and their different meanings came out during his life time. His evaluation of Bhavabhūti as poet in his *Bhavabhūti and His Place in Sanskrit Literature* is a pioneering work in the field of critical assessment of Sanskrit literature.¹

Unfortunately Barooah's stupendous literary project was left unfinished due to his untimely death. His brilliant career was cut

¹ The works of Anundoram Barooah have recently been reprinted by the Publication Board, Assam.

short at the prime of his life by the cruel hand of Death. He died in 1889 at the age of 39.

The subject chosen for the memorial lectures being the palaeography of Indian script with particular reference to the development of Assamese script, appears to be in conformity with the scholastic ideal held so dear to life by Anundoram Barooah. The development of various Indian scripts at different stages of history is an interesting subject. Much water has flowed down the river Ganges since G. Bühler and R. N. Cust had first undertaken a systematic study of Indian palaeography in the eighties of the last century. Since then several works showing the growth and development of Indian scripts with particular reference to regional variations have come out in print. So far as the evolution of Assamese-Bengali script is concerned, excepting the pioneering, but presently outdated, work by Dr. R. D. Banerjee, no serious and exhaustive treatment of the subject has yet been made. The late Sarbeswar Kataky made a laudable but preliminary study of Assamese script in his book entitled *Prācīn Ahamiyā Lipi*, but that work being of elementary nature could not properly show the historical development of Assamese script from the fifth century A. D. till the modern times. It may not be out of place to mention here that the modern Assamese script is not a natural development of the script used in the manuscripts by the writers of the early nineteenth century and earlier. The present Assamese script was introduced by Christian missionary writers in their printed Assamese books sometimes towards the middle of the nineteenth century. They adopted the Bengali script for printing Assamese books also. As the missionaries were the first printers and publishers of Assamese books, naturally therefore, the subsequent publisher followed them. It may also be noted that Bengali was declared as the medium of schools and courts of Assam in 1836 and it continued to be so, in spite of protest from the local people, till 1873. The Bengali script, therefore, found an easy access to Assamese cultural life. It must also be said that the Bengali script and the early Assamese script, though not exactly identical, is similar or in many cases identical to one another.

The history of Assamese script may be traced at least from the Umāchal rock inscription of Surendra Varman who is

supposed to have flourished in the fifth century A. D. Since then, we find an unbroken chain of inscriptions till the early part of the nineteenth century. Over and above the specimens of scripts offered by the inscriptions, we have a large number of manuscripts of the later medieval period. A systematic study of the scripts preserved in the inscriptions and manuscripts would give a clear picture of the development of Assamese script and its relation with the allied scripts. The salient features of the three styles of Assamese script, developed during the later medieval period, viz. Bānuṇiyā, Lahkari and Gargañā need to be brought out while studying its developments.

Dr. T. P. Verma is to be thanked and congratulated for making a systematic study of Indian scripts with special emphasis on the development of Assamese script. His work will certainly throw some new light on the Eastern Indian script and will be immensely helpful to those who are interested in the cultural history of the eastern region. I, on behalf of Asam Sahitya Sabha, express my sense of gratitude to Dr. Verma for delivering the memorial lectures.

January 26, 1976
Gauhati University
Assam.

Satyendranath Sarma
President, Asam Sahitya Sabha



ANUNDORAM BOROOAH

ANUNDORAM BOROOAH MEMORIAL LECTURES

DEVELOPMENT OF SCRIPT IN ANCIENT KAMARUPA

INTRODUCTION

Brāhmī is the great grand mother of almost all the scripts of India. Not only that but it has been responsible for the origin of so many scripts of Asia and South-East Asia. To trace the course of the development of these scripts is indeed very interesting and has very often attracted the attention of the scholars. India is a very vast country and it has since the time immemorial its own regional cultures. Consequently, they developed scripts of their own according to their needs and likings. Assam is such a region of India which has its own culture and traditions since very ancient times. It has contributed its own share to the development of a comprehensive and unified culture of India of which every Indian is proud of. The Asam Sahitya Sabha has organised this series of lectures, tracing the origin and development of the Assamese scripts, in the memory of the Late Sri Anundoram Borooah. I consider it a great honour to an humble and unknown student of Indian palaeography like me, to be invited for these lectures.

The writing is said to be an item of culture, and without it the full picture of a culture cannot be considered complete.

With the discovery of the Indus civilization the antiquity of art of writing in India has been pushed back to the third millennium B.C. But it has not been so far satisfactorily deciphered. Hence the Brāhmī still remains the only ancientmost script of India. The first specimens of Brāhmī are found in the edicts of Aśoka. Sometimes the Piprahva vase, Sohgaure bronze plate and Mahasthan plaque inscriptions are regarded as pre-Mauryan



but most recent researches of Ahmad Hasan Dani¹, C. S. Upasaka and others² have shown that these cannot be pre-Asokan. In this way the earliest possible evidence for the existence of the Brāhmī script does not go beyond the 4th century B.C.

To this conclusion we reach through a different way of reasoning. The Indian palaeography has a history of gradual evolution upto the recent times. The geographical factors as well as the time both have considerably affected the course of the development of Indian scripts. We know that during Asoka's time there was a unified standard script which was used throughout his vast empire. In the post-Asokan time, at least upto the second century A.D., the script shows very little development. That is to say the differences in the forms of letters in various parts of India are not so remarkable. For example, the characters of Sāñchi and Bharhut inscriptions are not so much different from those of the Hathigumpba inscription of Khāravela in Orissa or the Nanaghat inscription of Nāyanikā in Maharashtra. But when we reach in the seventh century A.D. we find that there is a vast difference in the scripts of Harshavardhana and Pulakesin II.

These regional differences become greater as we advance further in time. In this way the development of Brāhmī script in India can be compared with a tree which flourishes into many branches. When we climb down and march towards its root we see that these branches shoot off from a single stem. In the same way, tracing back the development of the evolution of Brāhmī script when we reach to the second or third century B.C. we feel that we are not far from the original source from which the Asokan Brāhmī was derived.

Now, the question arises whether the Brāhmī script, which we see in the edicts of Asoka, was an artificial creation or it was evolved through natural process. Through natural process we mean the principle of Uni-directional development of scripts of the world, propounded by many scholars such as David Deringer and I. J. Gelb. Prof. Gelb pointed out that from origin to full evolution a script has to pass through such necessary stages as logography, syllabography and alphabetography.

¹ I.P., p. 51 ff.

² Verma, T.P., P.B.S., p. 11 ff.

Whether a script is the creation of a people themselves or borrowed, it cannot skip over any developmental stage. That is to say that although in some cases the development may stop at a certain stage, no writing can start with a syllabic or alphabetic stage unless it is borrowed, directly or indirectly, from a system which has already gone through all the previous stages. On the other hand 'there can be no reverse development', i.e. 'an alphabet cannot develop into a syllabary, just as a syllabary cannot lead to the creation of logography.'³

We have pointed out that writing is an item of culture and has its origin and history in a particular cultural context. Many cultures of the world, at one or the other stage of their development, have started using the device of recording their languages. But the use of writing may not necessarily prove that it is the invention of the people themselves. Sometimes an existing writing system is adopted by a people to write their language or sometime—the knowledge of the existence of such a useful device inspires a people to create a new script for their speech.⁴

Now we will try to analyse the position of our Brāhmī script among the scripts of the world and the circumstances which were responsible for its origin or creation. Many western scholars have opined that the Brāhmī script was borrowed from some script prevalent in the Middle East. Professor Gelb⁵ believes that it has developed out of Semitic syllabary which, in turn, is a creation following the model of the Egyptian syllabary. Gelb, of course, is conscious of the difficulty of describing Brāhmī script as alphabetic or syllabic; for instance the consonant sign *ka* of Brāhmī (combined as it is with the vowel sound *a*) cannot be called an alphabetic sign, and still it could hardly be called syllabic. It appears that he postulates the Semitic contribution to Brāhmī to explain the almost complete absence of the earlier stages of this script. This is not the difficulty of Gelb only but it has been faced by all earlier paleographers, such as Bühler and Dani etc., compelling them to do many unwarranted speculations to prove its origin from the

³ *A study of Writing*, p. 201.

⁴ Verma, T.P., *Op.Cit.* p. 2.

⁵ *Op.Cit.*, p. 201.

Semitic script. Indeed, this is our problem too who do not subscribe the opinions of such scholars and are inclined to search for its origin in Indian context.

We will try to look at the problem of the origin of the Brāhmī script from another point of view. As we have pointed out above, a script can be created by intelligent and culturally advanced people simply by the knowledge of the existence of a system of writing. Our contention is that, on this hypothesis, all the difficulties about the origin of the Brāhmī script can be resolved. Further, we may also note that this pre-existing inspiring script need not necessarily be the Semitic one, not only for the reason that the Brāhmī is not derivable from any Semitic script but also because the possibility of pre-Brāhmī scripts in India cannot be ruled out as we shall see a little latter.

To consider the problem of the origin of the Brāhmī script we must look into the principles of inner and outer development. The principle of outer development is concerned with the evolution in the outer form of the letters which we find in Brāhmī and its later derivatives. On the other hand the principle of inner development concern mainly with the changes in phonetic values attached to the particular sign of a script. The phonetic value given to a sign also changes in the same way as the outer form of the letters evolves. But the principle of inner development can be said to be true mainly in the case of the development of Western alphabets. The Brāhmī alphabet, which better we should call *Varṇamālā*, shows little sign of inner development because it was created on the principle of Indian phonetic system which was perfected long before the time of Pāṇini, and is still serving many Indian and South-East Asian languages with minor adjustments. If we assume the existence of writing and the presence of a fully developed *Varṇamālā*, there can be no difficulty in creating a system of writing such as Brāhmī.

So far no Indian or European scholar has studied the problem of the Brāhmī script by analysing or separating the signs and the phonetic values attached to them. Not only the example of the creation of Brāhmī script is before us but we also have the example of the creation of another script during the time of Asoka or just before. And that is the Kharoshthī script. For the creation of this script, although the signs of

Aramatic script were used and the direction of that writing was followed, but, the Indian *Varṇamālā* was used. There is still another instance for creating or adopting the signs of Brāhmī letters to one's own language. In the famous *śiūpa* of Bhattiprolu a casket was found on which an inscription is recorded.⁶ Dr. Bühler has ascribed it to the third century B.C. but now it is regarded to belong to the first century A.D. In this inscription the letters *gha*, *ja*, *ma*, *sha*, *bha*, *la* and *ḷa* etc. have peculiar forms. It is a noticeable peculiarity of this inscription that the medial sign for *ā* is attached to these consonants. Explaining this Dr. Upasaka says that 'It is interesting to observe that even today in South India the short *a* followed by consonant is more emphatically pronounced than in North India.'⁷ This is a fine example of adaptation of phonology to one's own script; but it was neither necessary nor practicable. Because of this reason and due to the extensive propagation of the so called Brāhmī alphabet through inscriptions by Aśoka, such attempts were soon forgotten and left no trace on later scripts.

Now we would like to have a peep into the circumstances prevailing during and after the time of the Buddha in India which, I believe, will be helpful in understanding the origin of Brāhmī script. The sixth century B.C. has been described as 'an age of far reaching religious reformation activity over the whole of the ancient world.'⁸ Just as in Greece, Chinn and Irau, so also in India, this period witnessed a remarkable cultural movement, embracing every aspect of life—social, political, economic, religious etc.⁹ By this period in India, the tribal organisation of the Society has given place to territorial units and a large numbers of *Janapadas* had come into being, vying with each other for supremacy.¹⁰ Growth of towns and development of trade and commerce is another distinct feature of this age.¹¹ Probably money was invented during this

⁶ Bühler, G., *The Bhattiprolu Inscriptions*, E. I., Vol. II, pp. 323-29.

⁷ Upasaka, C.S., *H.P.M.B.*, p. 189.

⁸ *The Cambridge Ancient History*, III, p. 499.

⁹ See : Pande, G.C., *Studies in the Origins of Buddhism*, Ch. IX where an excellent account is available.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 311-12.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 314.

period.¹² In the field of religion and philosophy, the age is still noteworthy. There was a very marked tendency towards doubt and dissent and free speculation. We have a mushroom growth of ascetic teachers in eastern India all preaching anti-Vedic ways of life. The Vedic Brahmanical tradition received a definite setback and in its attempt to survive it was gradually transformed.¹³ In addition, many popular religions appeared which were to change the colour of the later religious history of India.¹⁴ Further, the thought of this period exhibits this remarkable feature that it is addressed not to a select minority, but to all without any distinction of caste or sex.¹⁵ All these developments were not mutually exclusive but part of a common cultural movement in India.¹⁶ The changes in social life appear to go hand-in-hand with those in the realm of thinking. The social changes probably created an 'occasion' for fresh thinking and new doctrines facilitated and justified changes in social life. The evidence, on the whole, is so overwhelming that here we are unmistakably in an age of a general awakening of the common people. This had far-reaching impacts on the social, religious, artistic, literary and linguistic history of India. We are mainly concerned here with the growth in the prestige and popularity of the languages of the common people.¹⁷ It is well-known fact that the *parivrājaka* teachers of eastern India during this period chose local dialects for their instructions,¹⁸ interested as they were in bringing philosophy into the open and proclaiming it far and wide. And here, the most significant contribution is that of Gautama the Buddha. Buddha not only adopted the spoken language of his region for his sermons but emphatically denied their preservation in any sacred language, and freely gave

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 315-17.

¹⁴ See : R. G. Bhandarkar, *Vaishnavism Saivism etc.* which treats the history of the popular devotional religions of India ; A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Yakshas*, pp. 1-3 ; G. C. Pande, *Op.Cit.* 318 ff. ; Hiriyanna, M., *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, Ch. III.

¹⁵ Hiriyanna, M., *Op.Cit.*, p. 87.

¹⁶ Pande, G. C., *Op.Cit.*, pp. 310-11.

¹⁷ Hiriyanna, M., *Op.Cit.*, p. 88.

¹⁸ See : *The Age of Imperial Unity*, pp. 281-82 ; Also of Belvalkar, S. K. and Ranade, R. D., *History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 460.

his consent to learn them in one's own tongue.¹⁹ It is thus possible to imagine that the Prakrit languages directly received a great impetus as a result of the cultural movement of the 6th century B.C. in general and of the attitude of the *parivrājaka* teachers like Buddha in particular. Prakrit languages thus became vehicles of sacred truths of religions and got an honoured place in literature, and they gradually spread through the nation and even beyond it.

Thus we observe that during the sixth century B.C. a background was ready for the creation of a script which could serve as a vehicle for the local dialects or the Prakrit languages. The necessity for its creation also was felt because the new entrants in the Buddhism were ambitious to put the teachings of Buddha in black and white. It is said that the year in which Buddha died five hundred monks assembled in the Saptaparna cave at Rājagṛha under the Presidentship of Kāśyapa. There a monk, named Upāli recited the 'Vinaya', the teachings of Buddha. It is believed that Buddha himself once claimed him to be the best in 'Vinaya'. The recitation of Upāli was considered to be the direct teachings of Buddha.²⁰ Thus it is quite possible that a necessity for recording these teachings was urgently felt by the Buddhists. We can also imagine that *perhaps* it was not possible for the Buddhists to record the teachings of their Lord in the prevalent sacred script which was *probably* being used by the Brāhmaṇas because of some difficulties. Thus they were compelled to create a new script of their own.

Considering the simple geometrical forms of the Brāhmī letters during the time Aśoka and the circumstances as detailed above one cannot resist the temptation of the conclusion that the Brāhmī script was perhaps the creation or invention of these people. Anxious as they were to record the teachings of Buddha in local dialect, they created a new script of 46 letters which could serve their purpose. The inventor, who also was a master of Sanskrit grammar, must have had full acquaintance of the problem which he so successfully attempted to solve. From the help of horizontal and perpendicular lines, dots,

¹⁹ Dutta, N., *Early Monastic Buddhism*, Vol. I, pp. 130-31.

²⁰ Ojha, G. H., *The Palaeography of India*, (Hindi), p. 4, fn. 9.

circles and semi-circles, angles, and curves he created a script which remained unsurpassed even after more than two and a half thousand years. Isaak Taylor's²¹ appreciation is worth reproducing here. 'Bold, simple, grand, complete the characters are easy to remember, facile to read and difficult to mistake, representing with absolute precision the gradual niceties of sound which the phonetic analysis of Sanskrit grammarians had discovered in that marvellous idiom. None of the artificial alphabets which have been proposed by modern phonologists excell it in delicacy, ingenuity, exactitude and comprehensiveness.'

A word about the name *Brāhmī* given to the script. The Late Prof. Rajbali Pandey observes, 'As its very name suggest the *Brāṇhī* script was invented by the Indo-Aryans for the preservation of '*Brahma*' or *Veda* and was originally and mainly employed by the *Brāhmaṇas*, whose duty was to conserve the Vedic literature and to hand it down to the succeeding generations by writing and copying the text from time to time and by teaching them to their students.'²² It was perhaps Bühler who first advocated the designation *Brāhmī* for the characters in which majority of the Aśokan edicts are written. But there is no definite evidence to accept that the name *Brāhmī* given to the Aśokan script is undoubtedly correct. In Buddhist and Jain books lists of the scripts prevalent in ancient India are given and almost all the lists begin with the name *Brāhmī*. In Vedic literature there are some references where the word *Brāhmī* occurs but it has neither been used in the sense of a speech (*Brāhmī-Vāk*) nor in the sense of a script.²³ Therefore, the designation *Brāhmī* to the script of Aśoka and its derivatives is simply a matter of convenience and not a matter of fact. Dr. Pandey's view that 'as the very name suggests the script was invented by the Indo-Aryans for the preservation of *Brahma* or *Veda*' is illusory because he presupposes the name *Brāhmī* for that script. As we have seen that the consideration of the reverse direction of the evolution of the Aśokan *Brāhmī* script

²¹ *The Alphabet*, Vol. II, p. 289.

²² Pandeya, R. B., *Indian Palaeography*, p. 35.

²³ Cf. Pathak, V. S., *Brāhmī athavā Brāhmī—Vaidika Bhāṣhā aurā Lipi*, (Hindi) *Madhya Bhārati*, Vol. II, 1959, pp. 13-16.

does not permit us to push its antiquity beyond the fourth century B.C. And therefore, there is no ground to accept the view that this script was that ancient and sacred script in which the *Brahma* or *Veda* was written or preserved.

The credit to propagate and make this script everlasting (*chirāñhitike*) goes to the religious fervour of Aśoka. He got his edicts engraved on rocks and pillars etc. throughout the length and breadth of the country in this script. It is often argued that the people of India were well versed in reading and writing at the time of Aśoka and that is why he got his edicts engraved throughout his vast empire at prominent places for their benefit. But actually this does not seem to be the case. In his Sarnath pillar edict and some other edicts he clearly asks his officials to read these instructions to the monks and the *Upāsakas* at certain intervals and occasions. Even if we suppose that the script was known to the public, we cannot accept that the language in which Aśoka gave his instructions was known to the people of the remote areas such as Mysore, Orissa or west Punjab where his rock edicts have been found. Under the circumstances we must surmise that his edicts were read to the public, if needed, which used to hear it as a sermon without properly understanding it, with religious attitude. It was his greatest service to the nation that he propagated this script all over the country and made it accessible to all people without discrimination, which in due course of time became the only script of India.

Once Aśoka started the tradition of writing his royal edicts in this script, it became an accepted custom for the coming generations of the rulers to use this script for their proclamations. It can be nothing but a tradition followed by the succeeding rulers which is generally followed very strictly. This can also explain the total absence of inscriptions before the time of the Mauryas. Even Chandragupta Maurya did not issue any royal proclamation.

A perusal of the early epigraphs after the time of Aśoka will show that for a few centuries Sanskrit language was not written in this script. It is only in the first century B.C. that we find an inscription of king Sarvatāta which is in a mixed language of Prakrit and Sanskrit. Incidentally it may be referred that the Śuṅgas, the immediate successors of the Mauryas

and the great champions of the Brahmanic revival, did not leave any inscriptions to their credit, although Pushyamitra Śunga performed two *aśvamedha* sacrifices. The same may be said about the Kāṇvāyanas also.

After the death of Aśoka this tradition was continued to some extent by his grandson Devānāṃpiya Daśaratha in Nāgārjunī cave inscriptions. Apart from this there is a marked dearth of inscriptional records in the late third century B.C. However, some inscriptions can be assigned to this period. These are : 1. Mahasthan inscription, 2. the Sohgaura bronze plaque inscription, 3. the Piprahva vase inscription and 4. the Ramagarh hill cave inscriptions. The Barli inscription, which was placed by Ojha in fifth century B.C., can really be assigned to the first century B.C. on palaeographic grounds. All these inscriptions can be ascribed to the close of the third century B.C. which can be designated as transitional period.²⁴ During this period, Brāhmī freed itself from the stereotyped formula of Aśoka's imperial mode of expression and tended towards popularity. After the death of Aśoka, disintegrating trends started functioning and regional cultural diversities, suppressed under Mauryan imperialism, were let loose because the successors of the Mauryas failed to keep the whole country under a single political canopy. And, because foreign invaders became more active on the north-western frontiers of India, smaller kingdoms sprang up and more intimate cultural contacts with the western world became inevitable. The former factor divided India into many sub-cultural units and the latter made some units more adoptive and progressive than the others in remote areas. The centre of cultural gravitation shifted from Magadh in the east to Mathura in the west and innovations and inventions in the field of writing were accepted in the west more readily than in the eastern and other parts of the country. The second century B.C. can be called as the age of experiments.²⁵ During this century several experiments were done on coins to give the script more appreciative forms. For making coins the punching technique was discarded and modern techniques such as incuse-stamping, diestriking and casting were adopted. Sometimes

²⁴ Verma, T. P., *Op. Cit.*, p. 10 ff.

²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 17 ff.

these coins with legends are attributed to the early third or even the fourth century B.C. which does not seem justifiable in the face of the fact that the Mauryas were ruling in this period and they did not use the knowledge of writing on their coins. The new techniques of coinage can be attributed to Greek influence. The Besnagar Garuda pillar inscription of Heliodoros also belongs to this period.

The next century was the period of diffusion²⁶ of the art of writing. In fact there seems to be a sort of movement towards the popularisation of the art. The legends on the tribal and local coins contributed in their own way. Through these coins the script reached into the hands of the common people. The construction of the great *stūpas* at Sāñchi and Bharhut was in progress and the enthusiastic *upāsakas* (householders) as well as *bhikkhus* took active part and gave donations. Beside their religious zeal the temptation and thrill of having their names engraved on the stone railing etc. contributed much towards the diffusion of the art of writing.

In the first century A.D. a new pen style was introduced.²⁷ The increasing popularity of writing introduced individual and personal elements in the script which consequently gave rise to local styles.

This short survey of the gradual popularisation of the *Brāhmī* script was necessary to give a clear idea about our thesis that the script of Aśoka, which is now known as the *Brāhmī*, was invented just before or during the reign of Aśoka.

Here it may be added that several European scholars have suggested that Aśoka got his inspiration to issue royal edicts from the Persian emperors. This is evident from the mode of starting his edicts which is similar to that of Persian inscriptions. In ancient Middle-East there were several civilisations which had tradition to record their languages and many of these writings have come to us. In traditional Indian literature we regularly find mention of Asura tradition with whom constant war of the Indo-Aryans, i.e. the Devas was going on. Consequently both these developed diagonally opposite cultures. The Persians and the Arabs inherited this Asura tradition. The

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 18 ff, and Dani, *Op.Cit.*, p. 77 ff.

word *deva* in local Arab and Persian literature is used in the same sense as the word *asura* is used by an Indo-Aryan. But at times whenever they came into contact they influenced each other. After Alexander's campaign into India both these cultures once again came into contact with each other. And consequently the tradition of writing royal proclamations on durable material such as stone etc. was adopted by Aśoka who got added impetus under the influences of Buddhism. Thus, considering the absence of royal inscriptions before the time of Aśoka (Chandragupta Maurya and his son Bindusara could have issued royal charters on durable materials because they lived long enough and ruled over a considerably vast empire), absence of the records of the Suagas, the champions of the Brahmanical revival (while during their times hundreds of records were engraved on the Sāñchi and Bharhut stupas), and, the use of Prakrit languages for writing in the so called Brāhmī script during the first few centuries after Aśoka one is constrained to think about the reason behind it. All these circumstances point out that Aśoka unhesitatingly adopted the Asura tradition of recording his royal proclamations and propagated them throughout his vast empire. This naturally propagated scripts also. In due course of time it proved so powerful a movement that it overwhelmed and overshadowed other scripts of India of which we find mention in the literature.

But this hypothesis does not eliminate the possibility of the existence of scripts in India during or before the time of Aśoka; rather it confirms the possibility.

Nearchos, one of the generals of Alexander, who accompanied him in the Punjab, records that 'the people of this place know the art of manufacturing paper out of cotton and tattered clothes.' This is a contemporary record of the knowledge of the art of writing in pre-Aśoka period. Similarly Megasthenes, who stayed at the court of Chandragupta Maurya from 305 B.C. to 299 B.C. as a Greek ambassador, also gives allusions for the prevalence of writing in India. Another Greek writer Q. Curtius also mentions soft inner bark of certain trees as a writing material.

These evidences, considered in the light of the above arguments, compel us to believe in the oft-repeated evidences in favour of the antiquity of art of writing in India going upto

the Vedic period. The Jātakas mention about the art of writing in contexts of private and official letters, royal proclamations, family affairs, usury and bonds etc. There is much strength in the arguments that the vast Vedic literature could not come into being without the help of the art of writing. Perhaps the name Brāhmī was given to some sacred script like hieroglyphs which was worshipped by all including the Jainas because we see that the Bbagavatsūtra are started with the salutation to the Brāhmī script (*namo bambhiye livive*).

In the present condition of our knowledge we cannot ascertain the exact nature of this sacred (*Brāhmī*) script or the script which was used for writing Sanskrit and Vedic language. But we can say it confidently that this script must have been complicated, because we know the amount of emphasis given to the correct pronunciation of the Vedic literature. A wrong pronunciation would kill the *vaimāna*.²⁸ It is also said that some letters were pronounced in several ways with different emphases, thus the necessity of a complicated script cannot be overruled. We do not know which script it was but it can be suggested that it must have been used with several determinative signs.

At present we have the Indus-Valley script before us for consideration but unless it is reliably deciphered we cannot reach at any definite conclusion. It is interesting to note Alberuni's observation in this connection. He says, 'as to the writing of alphabet of the Hindus, we have already mentioned that it had been lost and forgotten; that nobody cared for it, and that in consequence people became illiterate, sunken into gross ignorance and entirely estranged from science. But then Vyāsa, the son of Parāśara, rediscovered their alphabets of fifty letters by an inspiration of God.'²⁹

Now we will consider the elements which can be held responsible for the propagation and migration of the scripts. The script of Aśoka has been called 'imperial' because it had a unity of purpose and singularity of inscription, consequently establishing a standard for the Brāmī script throughout the

²⁸ दुष्टः शब्दः स्वरतो वर्णतो वा मिथ्या प्रयुक्तो न तमर्थमाह ।

स वाग्वज्रो यजमानं हिनस्ति यथेन्द्रशत्रुः स्वरतोऽपराधात् ॥

Pātañjali-mahābhāṣya, I.

²⁹ Sachau, E. C., *Alberuni's India*, pp. 171-72.

country.³⁰ But this script was not so popular, in the real sense of the term, at that time. Soon after his death we find that there is a considerable decline in the number of inscriptions. It increased during subsequent centuries gradually. In the remaining part of the third and subsequent two centuries before Christ the inscriptions were few and far between. In the Kṣhatrapa and Kushāṇa periods the script gained more popularity. This is evidenced by a large number of private records as compared to the royal ones.

This popularisation had a long impact on the propagation and migration of the scripts. Regional centres developed during his period where a number of writers emerged to make their contribution to the Brāhmī script. These *āchārya* writers must have had a number of disciple-apprentices learning the art of writing. These writers formed thus their own schools which were later on responsible for the development of regional varieties. In the first century A.D. the north India was having more intense writing activities than any part of the country. Here the writers were more interested in the swift flow of the hand rather than in the symmetry and ornamentation. To this the individual habits, likes and dislikes and the method of forming every letter was responsible for the development of several varieties. We will discuss the various elements responsible for the development of these regional schools of writing in other lecture but here we are mainly concerned with the migration of the scripts.

The transference of the gravity of the political power to the west in the post-Śuṅga period made the writing activities more intense in the western part of the northern India. The contact with foreign cultures also accelerated the process. The decline and disintegration of the Mauryan empire gave political independence to the tribes of north-western India and this inspired them to issue their own coinage on one hand and have political and cultural relations with the foreign people such as Indo-Greeks, Śakas and Pahlavas, on the other. The Greek writing indirectly influenced the course of the development of Brāhmī script.³¹ Indian tribal people tried to have changes in

³⁰ Verma, T. P., *Op. Cit.*, p. 23.

³¹ Dani, A. H., *Op. Cit.*, p. 52.

the shape of the letters of the Brāhmī script to suit the space available on the coins and have the appearance of Greek ones. This was in direct imitation of the Greek lettering on the coins. As a result the verticals of the Brāhmī letters were shortened and equalised giving them almost the same length and breadth, as we find on the Audumhara coins. Thus the north western India became more active in this field, and very soon it made its centre at Mathurā in the beginning of the first century A.D.

It can be noticed that the script maintained its unity throughout the subcontinent almost upto the fourth century A.D. We do not find any fundamental difference in the main body of the letters. The ornamental additions in some writings, such as Ikshvāku inscriptions, are essentially superfluous. Dr. Ahmed Hasan Dani says that 'this unity was the result not of any political integration as in the time of Aśoka, but of those socio-religious forces which were let loose after the invasion of the Kushānas and which gathered round different nuclei in different regions by the end of this period to develop into local cultures.'²² Professor Dani's observation is correct in a sense but I would like to attribute this unity mainly to the primary stages in the development of the Brāhmī script during the period.

The integration and disintegration of the political powers had also its role in the propagation and migration of the scripts. The uniformity of the Brāhmī script throughout the subcontinent during Aśoka's time is mainly due to political reasons. Soon after the disintegration of the Magadhan imperialism the western part of northern India became politically more active and hence we find them more advanced in the realm of writing in the subsequent centuries. Very soon almost whole of northern India became writing conscious but the style of the west predominates east as well as the south. By the end of the third and the beginning of the fourth century A.D. the situation changes. The Kushāna power weakened and the Maghas in the Kauśāmbī region were becoming more important and as a consequence we find the style of Kauśāmbī more advanced, for example, compare the Kauśāmbī *sa* and *ma*. But it is not only due to political powers but also due to the intensity of the

²² *Ibid.* p. 77.

writing activities as we shall see in the next lecture that the eastern style in some inscriptions of the Kushāṇa kings is so advanced that palaeographers have attempted to postulate the existence of many kings of that name. In the fourth century A.D. when the Guptas rose to power they naturally encouraged the Kauśāmbī style which was nearer their original home.

The larger kingdoms by their very nature had to adopt a uniform style within their jurisdiction. This feeling checked the growth of regional pockets and encouraged the spread of the style of an area throughout the length and breadth of the empire. We cannot deny the existence of an antithesis of regionalism which counteracted these political forces and were victorious, not on their own but with the help of the rise of the regional political powers also.

There is still another factor which can be said to be responsible to maintain the thread of unity of the scripts in different parts of the country since the Gupta period. That is the use of Sanskrit language. This helped in the easy movement of literates and scribes from one region to another and consequently spreading the technical skill or styles of writing.

Thus, we conclude this lecture with following propositions :—

1. The earliest evidence of the existence of Brāhmī, the great-grand-mother script of South and South-East Asia alphabet, comes from the Edicts of Aśoka in the early third century B.C. The developmental stages of the script also indicate the same. Probably the idea was already nascent in the air but the script burgeoned from its embryonic state around fourth or third century B.C.; perhaps by the Buddhists for recording their sacred texts. This is further supported by the fact that a great number of early inscriptions for centuries together was related to the Buddhist (and also sometimes Jaina) religion.
2. On the basis of internal and external literary evidences, it can be said with confidence that the art of writing was known to Indians long before the time of Aśoka. And the existence of earlier stages of writing in the form of pictographs, ideographs and especially the phonetic one cannot be denied.

With the help of these tenets one can understand the origin and development of Brāhmī in the Indian context.

3. A survey in the inscriptions coming from third century B.C. upto the third century A.D. reveals that this script was not so popular in the beginning but after some time it became the only script of India.

THE BACKGROUND

Palaeography is a subject which deals with the gradual evolution of the alphabet. It differs from epigraphy in a sense that the epigraphy studies the inscriptions for its contents and derives conclusions on the basis of the facts mentioned therein. But the purpose of a palaeographer is quite different. He studies it for its script. For him every letter, may be similar or different to others, has got some purpose. It tells him a story of its past and present and even it indicates sometimes its future shape also. The older palaeographers have emphasised on the exact copy of the letters and they usually discarded the practice of hand-drawing etc. This type of notion was the outcome of the necessity of dating the inscriptions on the basis of palaeography and thereby the lesser known or unknown kings mentioned in them, as well as the monuments, on which they are found engraved. They realised from the very beginning that the palaeography can be used as a handy time-scale for the reconstruction of the chronology of ancient India. The letter forms changed with the advancement of time and hence it is possible to ascertain, roughly, the date of a record on that basis. This gave rise to the necessity of making charts not by hand-drawings but by actual cuttings from the facsimilies to ensure accuracy. But in the later half of the present century we find a definite change in the concept of palaeography. The modern palaeographers like Dani¹ and others² neither think it necessary nor desirable. They study it in cultural context and relate it with the political and technical factors. In the formation of individual letters it is the writing material which matters much. No doubt the base material like paper, birchbark, palm leaf, even stone and metal have their own effect on the body of the letters but it is the pen and the stylus which had made revolutionary changes. In the development of the individual letters, a student of Indian palaeography is conversant with the fact that an insignificant limb of a letter starts developing and very soon it

¹ Dani, A.H., *I.P.*, p. 10.

² Verma, T.P., *P.B.S.*, p. 2.

becomes the most important part of the letter. These formations are mainly due to the tool used in the writing and also can be accounted for to the inclinations and mannerisms of the writers of the area. In the preparation of charts, etc. it is not the exact copy of the letters which is important but it is necessary to follow the movement of the hand.³ Here a word of caution be recorded about the copying of the letters from the lithophotographs published in the Journals. Generally very minute limbs of the letters are not clear in the published lithophotographs though these are present in the impressions and the original. Therefore, sometimes mistake may occur in the copying of the letters.

In our last lecture we have mentioned that the inscriptions of Aśoka had unity of purpose and singularity of inspiration. As a result of this there is a standard and uniform script throughout his vast empire. His successor *devānāmpriya* Daśaratha has left some epigraphs to us but he did not follow Aśoka's mode of expression and the formula of beginning the royal edicts, which was perhaps inspired by the inscriptions of the Achaemenide rulers of Persia. The succeeding dynasties of the Śuṅgas and the Kāṇavāyanas perhaps did not encourage the use of writing for their royal proclamations but at the same time they never came in the way of those who were engaged in doing so on religious or personal level. Here we must talk about the Bharhut *torāṇa* inscription which mentions, '*Suganaṁ rāje.*' This word has wrongly been interpreted as 'in the time of the Śuṅgas.' Actually this should be translated as 'in the kingdom of the Śuṅgas.'⁴ The successors of the Śuṅgas in the Deccan, the Sātavāhanas, have left several inscriptions to their credit in the western India. But the tradition started by Aśoka was continued by the newly formed smaller States of north-western part of the subcontinent even after the disintegration of the Mauryan empire.

These smaller States were in contact with the Indo-Greek rulers and they tried to imitate the script on their coinage consequently the height of the letters was reduced. But the most significant and revolutionary change in the Brāhmī script was

³ *Ibid.* p. 10.

⁴ Regarding its date and other relevant problems kindly refer to my article, *The Line of Dhanabhuti*, *J.N.S.I.*, Vol. XXXI, (1969), pp. 143-150.

introduced, perhaps by the Kshatrapas of Mathurā. This change was the result of the use of a new tool for writing, that is the edged pen. The writing tool, right from the time of Aśoka upto the first century B.C. was a rod-like thing which is responsible for the uniform thickness of the body of the letters. By the close of the first century B.C. the Mathurā Kshatrapas used an alphabet in which the verticals of letters have a tapering thickness. This was not a deliberate effort but it was the outcome of a skillful wielding of the new tool of writing. This worked in two ways; firstly, it gave an equal breadth to the letters and thus reducing their height, and, secondly, the thickness of the lines varied in various limbs of the letters. In this period different parts of the body of the letters were given special attention and they took altogether a different shape. This tendency became more marked in the pre-Kushāṇa periods. In the Kushāṇa period we find that the inscriptions issued by the individuals are larger in number than those issued by the kings.⁵ This is a definite sign of the popularity of the script. This needed more writers and consequently in different areas various schools of writing were established where, perhaps, several apprentices were working only to diffuse the art of writing, later on in many parts of the continent. Here we must mention that this diffusion of the art of writing was not uniform throughout the country as we find in the time of Aśoka. The inscriptions, such as that of Khāravel in Orissa and Sātakaṃi in Mahārāshṭra, both attributable to the beginning of the first century A.D., are although alike but show several archaic forms along with new ones. The reason behind this is that perhaps the knowledge of new technique was known to these remote areas but the skill was lacking.

As regards the style we are used to think in terms of dynasties. We know about the Kushāṇa style, Gupta style and so on. This type of terminology was sufficient for the purpose of the palaeographer of the nineteenth or early twentieth century. It was also inspired by the inclination of using the script as a time scale. But now in the light of large number of inscriptions at our disposal such a terminology has become insufficient. We cannot choose a single style and call it Kushāṇa or Gupta. We find palaeographic variations in the script used by the Kushāṇa

⁵ Verma, T.P., *Op. Cit.*, p. 109.

kings themselves. For example the Mathurā inscriptions of Kanishka dated in the 4th and 14th years and also the Mathurā inscription of Huvishka of the years 33 have some letters which do not belong to the Mathurā school. Similarly the Gupta emperors also used different scripts in different parts of their empire. The style of writing seen in the Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta is not found in his Eraṇa inscription.

Another tendency which was popular among the older palaeographers was to name these styles in terms of broad geographical divisions. Fleet, Burgess and Bühler, etc. have talked about the northern and southern alphabets in the 4th and 5th centuries A.D. Hoernle observes 'there existed at the time of the Gupta period two very distinct classes of the ancient Nāgarī alphabet, North Indian and the South Indian. The test latter for these two great classes is the character form. The northern class of alphabets, however, is again divided into two great sections which, through their areas overlapped to a certain extent, may be broadly, and for practical purposes sufficiently, distinguished as the Western and Eastern sections.'⁶ But this type of geographical classification also does not prove sufficient. It leaves entirely out of account the scripts in some areas. For example, the script developing in the eastern Malwa, which developed into square head mark neither comes in the southern class nor in the northern class. Similarly the changes which were going on in the script of Gujarat and Kathiawad, which was earlier associated with the southern characters, also remains unexplained.

Dani observes that⁷ 'These styles tended to become localized and affiliated to the various cultural regions in the subcontinent. These regional styles might have differentiated still further, but for two important factors which were instrumental in establishing a link between them and also in governing a uniform pattern in their development. The first was the use of a common language, Sanskrit, which helped in the easy movement of literates and scribes from one region to another and quick dispersal of technical skill or style of writing. The second was the growth of larger kingdoms, which by their nature had to adopt uniform

⁶ *J.A.S.B.*, 1891, Pt. I, p. 81.

⁷ Dani, A.H., *Op. Cit.*, p. 108 ff.

style of writing within their jurisdiction. It is on such assumptions that we can understand how the Kauśāmbī style of writing of the second and third century A.D. gradually spread throughout the Middle Ganges Valley and as far east as Bengal, after it was adopted by the Early Gupta.⁷ Therefore, it is more befitting to study the writing styles in the context of regions than in terms of broad geographical divisions or dynastic classifications.

In the mediaeval period several regions developed their own scripts. Alberuui⁸ writes about eleven scripts prevalent in the 11th century A.D. These were all regional scripts. Among these he writes about the Gauri (Gaudī) scripts used in Pūrvadeśa, i.e., eastern country. Today we are not in a position to identify at least three scripts mentioned by him, viz., Ardhanāgarī, Malawari, and Saindhava, which were current in Bhatia and Sindh regions.⁹ The reason behind this is that so far we have not been able to get enough material from these localities. But other scripts more or less can be identified. The Gaudi script is the script which was prevalent in the eastern countries like Bengal, Orissa and Assam. Here we are mainly concerned with these scripts of eastern India. Although the scripts of Bengal and Assam developed side by side and both have almost identical scripts but, since Assam has a separate culture of its own and also since the beginning of the 5th century A.D. right up to the 18th century A.D. the kings of Assam have issued their own records, the development of Assamese script can be studied on its own. In our next lecture, we will discuss the development of these alphabets. In this lecture we would trace the background on which the eastern alphabets started their journey towards full fledged alphabets of Assam.

The earliest known inscription found in the eastern most region is the Mahāsthān stone inscription, now in the Bogra district of Bangladesh. In this inscription there is a confusion between the dental *sa* and palatal *śa*. This inscription has been placed by Dani in the first half of the second century B.C.¹⁰ I have attributed it to the end of the third century or the beginning of the second century B.C.¹¹ The reason behind this is that the

⁷ Sachau, *Alberuin's India*, p. 173.

⁸ Cf. Dani, A.H., *Op. Cit.*, p. 112.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 57.

¹¹ Verma, T.P., *Op. Cit.* Chapter II.

nature of this inscription is administrative like that of the Sohgaurya Bronze Plaque inscription found in the Gorakhpur district of Uttar Pradesh, and hence this may be regarded to have been issued by Daśaratha or his successor. The form of dental *sa* in the Mahāsthāna inscription closely resembles to the *sa* in the Nagarjuni cave inscriptions of Daśaratha. In these inscriptions of Daśaratha the dental *sa* has a resemblance with the cerebral *sha*. But Dani points out the readings on the basis of that, this resemblance is proved to be an error 'by the addition of the medial *u* to the main curve of *sa*.'¹² According to him it is *sa* and not *sha*. But here it may be pointed out that such a confusion between dental *sa* and cerebral *sha* continues in later periods also in Bengal and also in Nepal in the inscriptions after 4th century A.D. In Assam, as will be clear from the tables (I—VI), this resemblance between the two letters persists in the inscriptions of Bhūti-varmana in 6th century A.D. and Dūbi plates of Bhāskaravarman in the early part of 7th century A.D. But, however, in the Nidhanpur plates of Bhāskaravarman separate sign for cerebral *sha* is used which continues in later periods also.

Other inscriptions of eastern region of north India, assignable upto the middle of the first century A.D., besides those mentioned above, are from Pabbosa (near Kauśāmbī), Ayodhyā in eastern Uttar Pradesh, Bodha-Gaya in Bihar, Bharhut in Madhya Pradesh and Hatbigumpba in Orissa. All these can be related to the style which developed later on into the Kauśāmbī style. Apart from the regional affiliation with eastern India there is not much in them which can be said to be stylistic characteristic of the region. They have more or less common characteristic with the knowledge of the new tool varying in different degrees of technical skill in its use.

From the Kushāṇa period onwards we mark a definite distinction between the styles of the east and west in the northern India. But, however, at the same time it should be noted that these distinctions were limited to a few letters and overlapped in area. Hoernle, as we have quoted above recognised sibilant *sha* as the test letter to distinguish between the eastern and western varieties of the Gupta period. Bühler adds two more

¹² Dani, A.H., *Op. Cit.*, pp. 55-56.

letters *la* and *ha* to this list. He observes that the difference between the Eastern and Western varieties of the so-called Gupta alphabet appear in the signs of *la*, *sa* (*sha*) and *ha*. In the Eastern variety, the left limb of *la* is turned sharply downwards cf. the *la* of the Jaugada separate edicts. Further the base stroke of *sa* (*sha*) is made round and attached as a loop to the standing central bar. Finally the base stroke of *ha* is suppressed, and its hook, attached to the vertical, is turned sharply to the left, exactly as in the Jaggayapeta inscriptions. In the Western variety these three letters have the older and fuller forms.¹³ R. D. Banerji adds a fourth test letter *sa* to this list. He notes that 'in the inscriptions of the Eastern variety, this letter always has a loop at the end of its left vertical line instead of the customary curve or hook, cf. the form of the letter in the Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta'.¹⁴

But these peculiarities can more or less be traced in the early Kushāṇa inscriptions also.¹⁵ For example we can cite the Mathurā inscriptions of Kanishka dated in the years 4 and 14 and also of Huvishka of year 33. Among these the inscription of the year 4 of the region of *Mahārāja* Kanishka has recently come to light and has been assigned by D. C. Sircar to Kanishka I.¹⁶ This inscription also bears the so-called eastern Gupta variety of letters *ma* and *ha*. But the most interesting is the debate on the date of the inscription of the year fourteen of Kanishka. Madam Van Lohuizen De Leeuw, on the grounds of its palaeography, proposes that this is a case of omitted hundreds and it should properly be dated to the 114th year of the Kanishka era.¹⁷ B. N. Puri supports her.¹⁸ S. N. Chakravarty observes that 'on palaeographic evidence this inscription cannot belong to Kanishka I and may be referred to about 262 A.D.'. ¹⁹ N. G. Majumdar holds that palaeographically it is impossible to refer this inscription to Kanishka I, that is to say to the early

¹³ Bühler, *I.P.*, p. 47.

¹⁴ *The Origin of Bengali Script*, p. 26.

¹⁵ Verma, T.P., *P.B.S.*, p. 114 ff.

¹⁶ *E.I.*, Vol. XXXIV, p. 9.

¹⁷ *The Scythian Period*, p. 263.

¹⁸ *India Under the Kushanas*, pp. 70-71.

¹⁹ Development of Bengali Alphabet, *JRASB (Letters)* Vol. IV 1938, p. 352.

Kushāṇa period, as its alphabet shows predominantly Gupta forms.²⁰ Commenting on the characters of this inscription D. R. Sahni observes that 'The characters used belong to the Brāhmī alphabet of the Kushāṇa period. It must, however, be noted that *ma* everywhere shows advanced form of the Gupta period with a small knob attached to the left of the letter instead of a triangular base. Similarly the letter *ha* assumes the form peculiar to the eastern variety of the Gupta script in which the horizontal base stroke is completely suppressed, the hook of this letter being sharply turned to the left. The *anusvāra* is throughout represented by a short horizontal stroke instead of the usual dot.'²¹

These palaeographic peculiarities of this inscription have compelled the scholars to doubt the date of it and thus to postulate the existence of a third Kanishka just before the Gupta period. But strangely enough they did not give any attention to the palaeographic peculiarities of the Mathurā inscription of Huvishka dated in the year 33. Actually these inscriptions do not belong to the Mathurā style but should be grouped among the inscriptions of the eastern class. Dani rightly observes that 'these peculiarities can be explained by placing them side by side with the inscriptions from the Kosam region.'

Besides these inscriptions from Mathurā there are other inscriptions of the eastern Indian class which can be assigned to pre-Gupta period.

These are :—

- A. The inscriptions from Sarnath, Sahet-Mahet and Kosam mentioning the name of Kanishka and dated in his era,
- B. the Allahabad Museum inscription of year 23; the Sarnath inscription of Asvaghosha of year 40, and the Pahladpur pillar inscription,
- C. the inscriptions of Magha rulers from Kosam and Bandhogarh regions dated between the years 52 to 139.

Among these inscriptions, groups—(A) and (B) can be distinguished from the (C). The former group does not appear to

²⁰ *E.I.*, Vol. XXIV, p. 148, fn. 4.

²¹ *Ibid.* Vol. XIX, p. 96.

use the line head-mark rather the verticals somewhat retain, though faintly, the tapering tendency seen in the early Kshatrapa inscriptions of Mathurā. Dani²² distinguishes between the groups (A) and (B) and observes that the style of group A is occasionally met with in the seal inscriptions at Bhita, Basarh and Sahet-Mahet as late as the fifth century A.D., and it persists longer in the Gupta coinage as an optional style. But we have grouped these together²³ because such variations have no lasting impacts on the scripts as a whole but can be sometimes observed in the writings of a single writer at various occasions. But the distinction of the head formation is there in some letters like *ka*, *kha*, *ga*, *gha*, *cha*, *chha*, *ja*, *la*, *sa*, *ha*, etc.²⁴ The Mathurā inscription of Kanishka has a *gha* with its right half sloping and left one curving but in other inscriptions the bottom is flat. The *cha* is of the beaked type. Along with the simple three armed *ja* there are some with the lower arm bent down. Several types of *na* occur in these inscriptions but the most common are those which have their base bent. Occasionally we meet open mouthed *na* also in the inscriptions of Kauśāmbī region. *Da* is usually of the angular type with its mouth open to right but in Allahabad Municipal Museum inscription we find a rounded *da* with the mouth open to left. This is the older form which has crept in here. *Na* is generally of bent base type and in some case the base is so much bent that it resembles with *ta*. The most advanced looped variety of *na* is seen in one of the inscriptions from Bandhogarh area. *Pa* is angular with flat base. In some inscriptions from Kosam region *ba* has its left side notched or bent *Bha* is of special interest. The Kusbāṇa inscriptions of group (A) have a broad and notched type but other inscriptions, including group (C), have simple broad type of *bha*. *Ma* is a letter which is regarded as the most sensitive one in this and Gupta period. A triangular flat or curved type of *ma* is coming down from the time of the Kshatrapas of Mathurā and it still persists here. But its most advanced variety for this period is the tailed one with a small knob attached to the left limb of the letter. *Ya* is of the tripartite type with its left arm occasionally curved

²² I.P., p. 89.

²³ Verma, T.P., *Op. Cit.*, pp. 114-115.

²⁴ *Ibid.* Table VI.

but sometimes it is looped also. The subscript *ya* is of both types; tripartite as well as bipartite. *Ra* in Kushāṇa inscription has always its lower tip curved to the left but in other inscriptions it is straight also. *La* is of the angular type as found in the Mathurā Kshatrapa inscriptions and *va* also is of the angular type. The palatal *śa* and cerebral *sha* show little advancement. But dental *sa* is most advanced in these inscriptions. Although the older left hook type *sa* persists there, a looped variety of *sa* is also seen. Thus out of the four test letters *sa*, *sha*, *la* and *ha* of the eastern variety of the Gupta script, three letters can be traced to have their background in the pre-Gupta script. We do not find the looped variety of cerebral, *sha* in this period. Though the different stages of the development of this type of *sha* is not difficult to trace but it can be noted that it abruptly comes in the early Gupta inscriptions and continues up to the early part of the 7th century A.D. in whole of the eastern India and Nepal and abruptly disappears after that leaving no trace at all at least in the inscriptions of Assam.

Among the early Gupta inscriptions which can be classed in the eastern variety the following may be listed :

1. Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta,
2. Udayagiri cave inscription of Chandragupta II,
3. Gadhwa stone inscription of Chandragupta II,
4. Bhita clay seals,
5. Basarh clay seal of Dhruvasvamini,
6. Sahet-Mahet seals and sealings,
7. Susunia rock inscription Chandravarman,
8. Dhanaidah grant of Kumaragupta I,
9. Mankuwar inscription of Kumargupta I,
10. Kahaum pillar inscription of Skandagupta, and
11. Bihar pillar inscription of Purugupta, the second half of which is influenced by the western variety.

In the Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta the Kauśāmbī style of the 2nd, 3rd centuries A.D. is further elaborated. By the fourth century this style spreads in the Ganga Valley up to Bengal. The Susunia rock inscription of Chandravarman is written in this style. Dani observes that 'it is surprising to find an inscription in the Kauśāmbī style in Bengal in the middle of the fourth century A.D., to which period king

Chandravarman is generally assigned. Palaeographically the Susunia inscription does not seem older than the close of the fourth century A.D. But an earlier intrusion from Kauśāmbī is not unlikely.²⁵

The Allahabad pillar inscription shows a definite advancement over the Magha writing of the region. It evolves a line head-mark which is found occasionally notched also. In the application of the medial marks, the eastern style is followed but sometimes Kushāṇa system is also seen. The tip of the medial *ā* bends a little down words and is attached to the top of the letter. But in the case of *na* it is found in the lower right vertical. The medial *i* mark is elongated and occasionally reaches below the head mark. The right arm of the long *ī* medial is also elongated. The sign for medial *u* is slanting but bent a little downwards and attached at the lower part of the letter. Other medials *e*, *ai*, *o* and *au* are in Kushāṇa style.

Here the so called test letters of the western variety of the Gupta period are best illustrated. The letter *la* has its left limb, in the words of Bühler, 'turned sharply downwards'.²⁶ This type is named 'hook type' by Dani.²⁷ Similarly the right arm of *ha* also takes a downward turn sharply and is called 'hooked type.' The mid-line of *sha* is either horizontal or sharply bent downwards to the base, producing a loop at the left of the latter. This gave a close similarity with the dental *sa*, the left hook of which also developed into a loop. This atleast for two centuries to come there remains a confusion between the two and there is almost no distinction in them. Though in this period there is no curve seen in the long verticals of the letters but the letters like *pa*, *pha*, *ba* and *sha* show a slight bent in their sides. *Pa* shows a bent in its base line. *Ma* has a knob or tail at its lower left end. *Na* is usually of the open mouth variety but it developed a loop at its lower left limb also which is seen occasionally.

These are the features also seen in the Susunia inscription of Chandravarman. Now we have come to a point from where we can start our venture to trace the development of the alphabet in Assam. This we propose to take up in our next lecture.

²⁵ Dani, A.H., *Op. Cit.*, p. 102.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

THE ASAMĪYĀ SCRIPT

In the light of our previous discussions we have come to a point from where we can start an enquiry into the development of the alphabets in Assam. Any person, who has not studied the Assamese culture and history very closely is apt to face the question that while the scripts of modern Bengal and Assam are very much similar, if not identical, what is the justification in tracing the origin and development of the script of Assam, specially when there are good monographs of R. D. Banerji¹ and S. N. Chakravarty² on the Bengali script. But there are atleast two vital reasons to take up the subject.³ The above mentioned monographs have very little to say on the inscriptions from ancient Kamarupa as if they had no contribution to the scripts which are now serving both the cultural regions. The inscriptions form major part of the basic material on which the development of the script of a region can be studied. And Assam is very fortunate in this regard. This is one of the rare regions which can be considered lucky in having epigraphic material from the fifth century A.D. onwards. Besides, there is large number of manuscripts, for the later period, which could be used with benefit. The other reason is that, Assam has maintained its cultural individuality throughout. The beginning of the Bhauma-Varman dynasty can be traced at least from the pre-Gupta period and the family ruled over Kamarupa upto the middle of the seventh century A.D. During the later part of the rule of this dynasty not only Assam but portions of North Bihar and Bengal also were under their influence. Some later kings of the succeeding dynasties also tried to regain the lost boundaries of the kingdom. At least

¹ *The Origin of the Bengali Alphabet*, Calcutta, (Reprinted, 1973).

² *The Development of the Bengali Alphabet from the Fifth Century A.D. to the End of the Mubammadan Rule. J.R.A.S.B. (Lettres)*, Vol. IV, 1938, Article No. 14, pp. 351-391.

³ There are at least two monographs about the Asamīyā script which can be referred to. One was published in 1936 by Mr. S. Kakati and the other by Mr. D. Neog in 1964. Both of these are valuable and pioneer works but are very synoptic in the treatment of the subject.

upto the eighth century the flow of the political and cultural current was from Assam towards northern Bengal. But in the subsequent centuries, with the establishment of strong kingdoms in Bengal, the trend changed and the kings of Assam were forced to remain content with their possessions in Kamarupa and other areas. Sometimes they had to accept the vassalage of the kings of Bengal. After the twelfth century Assam was ruled by several tribal kings and they were struggling for supremacy until the Ahoms could succeed in getting the whole Assam under their rule. The Koches, the Ahoms, the Jayantias and the Kacharis all have contributed their share in the development of the 'cultural whole' of Assam.

In the development of the regional scripts of India the regional languages have played an important role. Between the sixth and tenth centuries A.D. most of the regional languages had started taking definite form and shape and made their existence felt in the written literature, though in a very vague manner. This was mainly because of the establishment of regional (i.e., national in the narrower sense of the term) kingdoms. The use of Sanskrit in these courts was a fashion, and was considered a characteristic of high scholarship. And this was a definite hindrance in the way of the development of regional languages. But, when these local languages were backed by some popular movement they got their influence felt over the courts and gradually succeeded in getting acceptance of the literates as something which can be reduced to writing. In my humble opinion the growth of regional scripts was directly related with the growth of regional languages and their use in the written literature.

The influence of the local Assamese language on the epigraphs of the kings of Assam have been noticed by the scholars and they have tried to relate it with the *Magadhan apabhraṃśa*. But I take a bit different attitude on this. My contention is that Assam, like many other regions of India, had its own dialects from the very beginning which were influenced, in due course of time, with Sanskrit and many other languages with whom it came into contact. This explains the presence of the words from many languages but at the same time the retention of its own grammar and construction of sentences. But it requires intense activity and movement for a dialect to be

accepted as a language worthy of reduction to writing, especially when the royal and scholarly patronage is indifferent. And when it gets such an acceptance it starts changing its shape due to the influence from those who in their own turn are influenced from other literary languages. The Assamese language is no exception to such influences.

Although we can trace the origin of the Assamese language into antiquity, we have written epigraphic material only in Sanskrit, the language of the Court in Assam as in many other parts of the country. These epigraphs show that the Assamese scripts can seek their parantage to the Brāhmī script which later on developed in North India into proto-regional script, popularly called by the palaeographers *Kuṣiḷa* or 'acute angled' or *Siddhamātrikā* script. This, in due course of time, developed into proto-nāgarī and nāgarī. The Assamese happens to belong to this family of scripts. As we will see a little later, the Assamese script, though having general resemblance with other north Indian scripts, has maintained its individuality, may be in cases of only a few letters or in the mode of attaching medial signs.

Though we are fortunate in having epigraphic material right from fifth century A.D. but these are not so abundant. For our palaeographic study we have selected the following epigraphs and analysed the alphabets as shown below.

S. No.	Century	King's name & date	Code No. of Inscrs;	Name of Inscr	Table Nos.
1.	5th Century	Surendravarman or Mahendravarman c. 450-485	a	Umāchal Rock inscription	I
2.	6th Century	Bhutivarman c. 510-555	b	Baḍagaṅgā Rock inscription	II
3.	7th Century	Bhaskaravarmana 594-650	c	Dubi C.P. inscription	III-IV
			d	Nidhanpur C. Pls inscription	
4.	9th Century	Harjjaravarman 815-835	e	Hayuñthāl C. Pls	VII-X
		Vanamaladeva 835-865	f	Parbatyā Pls.	

S. No.	Century	King's name & date	Code No. of Inscr.	Name of Inscr.	Table Nos.
5.	10th Century	Balavarmana 885-910	g	Nowgong grant	XI-XII
6.	11th Century	Ratnapala 1010-1040	h	Bargaon grant & Suakuchi grant	XIII-XVI
		Indrapala	i	Gauhati grant Guakuchi grant	
7.	12th Century	Dharmapala 1095-1120	j	Khonāmukhī grant Subhāṅkarapātaka grant Pushpabhadra grant	XVII-XXIV
		Jayapala 1120-1138	k	Silimpur inscr. of Prahāsa	
		Vaidyadeva 1138-1145	l	Kamauli grant	
		Vallabhadeva 1175-1195	m	Assam Plates	

This selection of inscriptions was restricted by their availability on one hand and by the clarity and redability of the published impressions on the other. Though there are certain other inscriptions which were not included in the present study but this selection is fairly representative and sufficient enough to trace the course of the development of script in Assam during this period.

The chronology of these kings is yet to be settled finally and there are divergent views about it. For the present study I have followed the chronology fixed by Professor P. C. Chaudhury in his famous work *'The History of Civilization of the people of Assam : to the twelfth century A.D.'* But even in this we have made certain adjustments, e.g., though Dr. Chaudhury assigns Balavarmana III a reign period of 25 years between A.D. 885 and A.D. 910 and thus it falls in the end of the ninth and the beginning of the tenth century A.D. But we have deliberately put him in the tenth century so that this century may not go unrepresented. Similarly Dharmapala also has been assigned a rule between A.D. 1095 and A.D. 1120. His Khonāmukhī grant was issued in the first year of his reign and

the Śuhhaṅkarapātaka in the second year, and, thus strictly speaking these two grants will fall at the end of the eleventh century. His Pushpabhadra grant was issued towards the end of his rule. But all these inscriptions have been bracketted with those of the twelfth century A.D. For palaeographical study these minor adjustments does not matter much.

The palaeographic studies, at least up to the mediaeval period, mainly depend upon epigraphs. Although manuscripts of this period are also available to us but only a few of them have been studied properly. The epigraphs also are few and far between. When they belong to a period with long gap in between they naturally show considerable changes and advancements in the formation of the letters. But the absence of the epigraphs during a period does not mean that the writing activities during the gap period was held up and the advancement has come to us abruptly. Therefore it should be presumed that the writings which reach us in the form of epigraphs or manuscripts are random samples and be treated as such. On the other hand these are the outcome of intense writing activities in between the periods. It should be noted here that more intensive writing activities tend to produce more changes in the form of the letters. Thus the changes in the outer form of the letters, beside the writing material, are directly connected with the writing activities.

Dani notices three 'stylistic tendencies' which were responsible for the development of the proto-regional scripts in India. These tendencies are more or less applicable to the regional scripts also. According to him 'the first was the result of a technical development, either in the use of new tools or in the new manner of using the old tools; the second was due to the taste for better or ornamental forms; and the third was dictated by a desire for speed and simplification, which is the real motive in cursive writing.'⁴

As regards the technical process 'it is the outcome of the use of pen as a writing tool which was popular throughout the northern India.' According to Dani it gave 'three important characteristics to the letter forms; (a) a definite head-mark to the letters of the north. It assumed the shape of a solid

⁴ *Indian Palaeography*, p. 113.

triangle. (h) From the fifth century A.D. onwards the pen leaves behind a hlot at the foot of the verticals, which gradually begins to grow ... and new forms of the letters are evolved. In some cases this hlot develops a tail as in *da* and *ra*, and in some as in *bha* and *sa*, it grows into a triangle and later opens its mouth... (c) From the sixth century there is noticeable a peculiar twist of the pen which makes an interplay of thick and thin lines in the ornate medial vowels.' This tendency leads to the origin of *Kuṭila* letters.

Dani ascribes the formation of *Kuṭila* alphabet from the last quarter of the sixth century A.D. in north India to the tendency for ornamentation. This is achieved by the twist of the pen. He observes, 'the right vertical limbs of the letters become slightly bent inwards (*Kuṭila*), and hence Fleet's term *Kuṭila* alphabet. At the same time, because of this bending, this vertical makes an acute angle with the base line, and hence Bühler's term 'acute-angled' alphabet. Bühler realized correctly that this acute angle is found much earlier than the *Kuṭila* tendency and hence he traced this type of writing back to the fifth century A.D. But such a tendency can be seen in letters such as *sa* even earlier. Thus it is very difficult to adhere to Bühler's term.'⁵

The taste for ornamentation in letters is exhibited in the formation of head-marks and medial signs. This we will point out while dealing with their individual palaeography.

The third tendency of simplification was directed by the motive of speed. It is not correct to say that the simplified style was usually adopted in the case of copper plates or manuscripts. The Banskhera plates of Harshavardhana is in the ornate style while his Madhuhan plates in simplified style. In Assam the Hayunthāl copper plate inscription can be ascribed to the simplified style which seems to have been written in cursive style as evidenced in the formation of individual letters and their medial marks. Dani observes that later on 'the bent (*Kuṭila*) right limbs of the letters in the north become straightened but leave a tail behind—a feature of most of the North Indian letters ... It is fully marked in the development of the regional scripts of the next period. In fact the preference for

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 115.

simplification in one or the other way is one of the important factors contributing to the differentiation in the regional scripts.'

With these preliminary remarks we can switch over to the study of the inscriptions from Assam. The earliest inscription discovered so far is that of Surendravarmana. This Surendravarmana is tentatively identified with Mahendravarman, the sixth ruler of Bhauma-Naraka dynasty, counted from Pushyavarmana. Mahendravarmana has been assigned a reign period between A.D. 450 to A.D. 485 by Prof. Choudhury.⁶ The dating of this king by D. C. Sircar⁷ is a bit different but he also assigns him in the late fifth century A.D. According to Prof. Sircar and P. D. Chaudhury 'the characters belong to the Eastern variety of the Gupta alphabet assignable to a period between the fourth and the sixth century A.D.'⁸ We can compare it with the Susunia rock inscription of Chandravarman⁹ which is in the Kauśāmbī style of the fourth century A.D. Our inscription, though in the same style, shows a definite advancement from the Susunia one. Both the epigraphs have letters with triangle head-mark. The right and left arms of *ka*¹⁰ are still open and pointed downwards. *Ga* in both cases is flat topped and has a foot mark at the left vertical. *Ja* is three armed type but in the Umāchala specimen the lower arm is further bent downwards; a later tendency. *Na* is open mouthed type, with a loop at the left can be seen in both the epigraphs, but there is one specimen of *na* in the section B of Susunia inscription which is without a loop; also found in the Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta. *Ta* has no difference. There is no initial *da* in the section A of the Susunia inscription but in the section B there is an old type *da* with a line head-mark turned to left. *Dha* in our inscription is advanced as its left side is bent inward. *Na* in both the epigraphs are of looped variety. There is no *bha* in Susunia but in our specimen there is a blot at the left foot of the letter. *Ma* has a tail at its left;

⁶ *The History of Civilization of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D.*, p. 515.

⁷ *E.I.*, Vol. XXX. p. 68.

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 67.

⁹ *E.I.*, Vol. XIII, pp. 133 ff.

¹⁰ For references to letters referred in the text please consult the Tables at the end.

but in the subscript it is not there in both the instances. *Ya* is represented only in our epigraph under study and it is tripartite type with a loop in its left arm. *Va*, *sa* and *Sa* in both instances are almost similar with negligible variations. But *ha* in our epigraph is of advanced type with its lower tip sharply turned towards left instead of forming a hook. Only two types of *ā* medials are noticed in the Umāchal rock inscription. One is slanting stroke at the top of the letter but in *nā* a hooked mark is added to the lower right of the letter. In *Jā* the slanting stroke going upwards is attached to the middle arm. The medial sign for *i* is a curve turned to left the lower tip of which reaches the head-mark as seen in *mi*; but in *dhi* it is ornamental. The long *i* medial in *śrī* is horn type in both the inscriptions. The subscript *ra* is attached to the lower tip of the letter in the form of the letter in the form of a line going towards left; but as a super-script it is placed at the top of the head-mark of letter. The super-script *ra* always doubles the subsequent consonant. Most interesting is the representation of the mute *m* in *kritam* in line 2 in the form of a full fledged *ma* attached to *ta*. The confusion regarding differentiation between *ba* and *va* is noticed here in the word *Valabhadra* instead of *Balabhadra* in line 3.

These features indicate that the Umāchal rock inscription certainly belongs to a later date than that of Chandravarman and it can be placed in the fifth century A.D.

The Badgaṅgā inscription of Bhūti-varmana shows more advanced features than the Umāchal rock inscription. D. C. Sircar accuses¹¹ of 'doctoring' with the impression published in *E.I.* Vol. XXVII and thus there arose a controversy regarding the reading of the date in it. The date read in it is 234, usually accepted to be in the Gupta Era, (A.D. 319-20) corresponding to A.D. 553-54. The use of the Gupta Era by the kings of Kamarupa is corroborated from the Tezpur rock inscription of Harijjanavarmana dated in G.E. 510 (A.D. 829-30). In this epigraph 'Gupta 510' is engraved in a quadrangular enclosure. As such there can be little doubts about its being in the Gupta Era. Dr. Sircar reads this portion as '*Āyushkāman*' and I have accepted his reading. Palaeographically this epigraph can be

¹¹ *E.I.*, Vol. XXX, pp. 62-67.

assigned to the middle of the sixth century A.D. which, in a way, supports the date assigned to king Bhūti-varmana.

The letters of this inscription do not show much difference from those of Umāchal inscription. The looped variety of *na* is dropped afterwards, and, only open-mouth type remains with a tendency of elongating the right and left curves of the verticals. The left foot mark of *bha* has become more prominent. Medial signs for *u* in *gu* and *bhu* goes upwards reaching almost up to the head mark; but in *Yu* it is a downward stroke almost in the line of the right vertical of the letter. *l* and *ī* signs are more ornamental especially in *śrī*. Subscript *ya* is bipartite, the right arm of which reaches up to the middle of the vertical. The distinction between *sa* and *sha* disappears. *śa* has a flat top with a foot mark in the left leg. The vowel *i* has two dots put vertically to the left of a vertical line. This vertical line also has a head-mark. In this inscription we notice that there is a taste for embellishment of the ornamental medial signs and at the same time a tendency for simplification also can be marked in letters such as *da*, *ma*, *ha* etc. The execution of this inscription of Surendravarmana. One thing can be noted here that in both these inscriptions the mode of attaching medial vowels is similar to the Mathura style inscriptions of the Kushāṇas which was also followed in the coinage of Guptas. In the copper plate inscriptions of Bhāskarvarman the same mode of attaching medial vowels persists.

The next century is marked by the epigraphs of Bhaskaravarmana who can rightly be regarded as one of the great personalities of his times. His Dubi¹² plates, Nidhanpur¹³ plates and Nalanda¹⁴ seals are representative Assamese epigraphs of the seventh century A.D. A comparison of the characters of both the plates shows that although there is a general resemblance between the two but there are certain marked differences in the formation of some of the letters and medial signs. Palaeographically the Dubi plates are earlier than the Nidhanpur plates. The head-marks of the former are generally in the form of a line with a blot at the left end and usually the right end

¹² Sircar, D.C., *E.I.*, Vol. XXX, pp. 297-304.

¹³ *E.I.*, Vol. XII, pp. 65ff and, Vol. XIX, pp. 118ff & pp. 445-450.

¹⁴ *J.B.O.R.S.*, Vol. V, pp. 302-03.

is slightly stretched downwards. In certain cases a further prolongation of the line head-mark to right with downward stretch serves the long *ā* medial stroke, e.g. in *tā*. But on the other hand head-marks in the Nidhanpur plates are different. They are like a blunt triangle of which the lower middle portion is rounded. This type of head-mark is noticed even in the top arm of *ja* in Nidhanpur grant. The long *ā* medial is usually a slanting stroke in the letters *kā*, *khā*, *gā*, *chā*, *jā*, *dā*, *pā*, *tā*, and *shā*. As indicated above, this is from Mathura style of the Kushana period. But in other letters such as *tā*, *thā*, *dā*, *dhā*, *nā*, *bhā*, *rā* and *hā* it is in the form of a prolongation of the head-mark to the right with its tip bent a little downwards. This style becomes popular henceafter and is mostly found in the Nidhanpur grant. A third type of *ā* medial is in the form of a book which is usually attached at the bottom of the letter such as in vowel *ā* in the Dubi plates. In the inscriptions of fifth and sixth centuries this has been used in *na* also. But in the *nā* of Dubi grant it is attached at top right arm of the letter and its hook is turned upwards which is peculiar practice. In the letter *ghā* the book is attached at the top of the right arm pointing downwards. In Nidhanpur grant in letters *ā*, *nā*, *thā*, *dhā*, *pā*, *mā* and *yā* etc. this type of *ā* medial is seen. It is interesting to notice that in the Dubi plates *shā* and *sā* are distinguished by the way of attaching the *ā* medial sign. In *shā* it is attached at the left arm and is of slanting type while in the *sā* it is in the right arm in the form of a book.

The *i* medial is a curve at the top of the letter towards left occasionally reaching below the bead-mark in the Nidhanpur grant. Long *ī* medial is usually in the form of double strokes; one is a curve to the left and the other a slanting stroke resembling *ā* medial, especially in the Dubi grant. But in the Nidhanpur grant it is a single curve turned to the right.

The *u* medial is usually a downward prolongation of the right leg of the letter but in certain letters, such as *gu*, *tu*, *du*, *bhu* and *su* in the Dubi plates, it is formed by turning the lower tip of the letter to the right and drawing it upwards reaching almost the bead-mark. In *ru* it is hook at the lower tip of the letter. But in Nidhanpur grant only the first and the third form are preferred. *ū* in Dubi plates is either formed by an additional

hook in the up-turned medial *ū* or with a left curve attachment to the vertical type of the medial *ū*.

The hooked type of *ṛi* medial is most popular in both the grants but the curved medial is also seen in *kṛi*, *nṛi*, *bṛi*, & *bhṛi* in Dubi plates.

E, *ai*, *o* and *au* medials are made by the combination of the medial signs described above.

Of the initial vowels we find *a*, *ā*, *i*, and *u*. Among these *i* is most important in the Dubi plates which is made up by a *visarga* sign followed by the sign for *da*. But this is a further development of the vowel by embellishment of the letter found in the Umāchal and Baḍgaṅgā inscriptions mentioned earlier. The Nidhanpur *i* is of the usual northern type made by two strokes above and a tailed one below.

Among the consonants attention may be drawn only to a few letters which are interesting from the viewpoint of the future development. For example, the outer curves of the open mouthed *na* is extended further which gave a new shape to the letter in the coming centuries. The right vertical of the letters such as *pa*, *ma* and *ya* etc. in the Nidhanpur grant have started forming acute angle which later on developed into the *Kuṭila* form of the letters.

The foot marks in the letters *bha* and *ra* have become more prominent and in some *bha* letters it has started the process of opening its mouth, e.g. in the Nidhanpur grant.

Ba is to be seen in the Dubi plates for the first and last time in the inscriptions of Assam, after which it disappears. As in Bengal the distinction between *va* and *ba* was not done in Assam also. Probably this was due to the pronunciation peculiarities. In the Dubi grant as well as in all the subsequent writings of this part of the country the *ba* sign is usually indicated by the sign for *va*. But there are a few cases in which the sign for *ba* has been not only used in its proper place but also wrongly instead of *va*. It is also interesting to note that *la* and *ha* in the Dubi plates are of the eastern variety as found in the Baigram grant of the time of the time of Kumaragupta I. But in this inscription western type of *ha* is also seen. *Ya* is always of the tripartite type in the Dubi plates while a bipartite *ya* is seen in the Nidhanpur grant. Although in the Dubi plate the *sha* is of the looped variety resembling with the letter *sa*, the

Nidhanpur plates exclusively shows the western variety of *sha* without the loop.

In the light of above peculiarities may we suggest that the Duhi grant was issued by Bhāskarvarma before his treaty of cooperation with Harshavardhana Śīlāditya while the Nidhānpur grant belongs to a later date having many elements from the so called western style of writing. This grant can be said to have been written in *Kuṭila* alphabets.

It appears that after the death of Bhāskaravarman, in the middle of the seventh century A.D., there was a hiatus in the political arena of northern India. Harsha had died a few years earlier leaving no successor. In Bengal also there was no powerful monarch after Sasanka. This state of affairs continues for more than a century and this can probably be the cause for a marked dearth of inscriptions in the eastern part of India in the eighth century A.D. But when we reach at the ninth century the inscriptions of Harjjarvarman present before us a more advanced form of writing befitting to his age. From this it is evident that although we are not fortunate enough in discovering royal grants of this period the writing activities were not stopped in Assam. This advancement is noticeable in the formation of the body of the letters as well as in the style of attaching the medial signs.

The Hayunthāl copper plate¹⁵ inscription of Harjjarvarmana and the Parbatiya plates¹⁶ of Vanamāladeva have been selected for the study of the writing of this period. These are written in the so-called *Kuṭila lipi* also called *Siddhamātrikā* and Early *Nāgari*. The former grant is in cursive hand while the latter was carefully written and engraved. Except this there is no fundamental difference between the letters of these two grants.

Of initial vowels only *a*, *i*, *u*, and *e* have been found, in the Parbatiya plates. All these are of the usual type except *i* in line 23 (*iti*) where its lower part has a double curve (not illustrated in the tables).

The medial sign for long *ā* is of three types. The most usual is a *daṇḍa* at the right of the consonants generally joined at the top with their head-mark. The second type is a half *daṇḍa*

¹⁵ K.S., pp. 44-53.

¹⁶ E.I., Vol. XXIX, pp. 145-59.

reaching down only up to the half of the length of the consonants at their right. The third type of *ā* medial comes a little down from the right end of the head-mark and then goes up, leaving a sharp curve below and ending in a stroke curved towards the right above the head-mark as in *jā* and *hā*. The *i* medial is a full length curve at the left of the letter issuing from its head-mark. Long *ī* medial is in the form of a *danḍa* of the right of letter which shoots up from the head-mark and then comes down. The *u* medial is either in the form of a double way standing stroke at the lower tip of the letter as in *chu*, or in the form of a curve towards left at the lower tip as in *ku*, *gu*, *tu* etc. In *ru* it is a downward hook at its right issuing from the middle of the letter. Long *ū* in *rū* is formed by an additional stroke going upwards issued from the same point. Long *ū* is in the form of a leftward stroke at the bottom with a curve at the end. But in *bhū* it is formed by joining the usual sign for *u* with a *danḍa* put at the right of the consonant. Medial *e* is formed by lengthening the head-mark towards left ending in a curve.

Among the consonants *ja*, *na*, *da*, *bha*, *ra*, *la*, *śa*, *sha*, *sa* and *ha* have shown much development. The lower arm of *ja* takes a further turn and middle one is extended downwards while the upper arm is reduced into the headmark. The right and left curves of *na* have been further extended and open space in the middle is reduced. But the right curve develops into a *danḍa* while the left one retains its curvature. *śa* in the Parbatiya grant takes the form of two circles one over the other at the left of a *danḍa*, the upper circle being hollow. The blot at the left of *bha* and *sa* open their mouth. A rare consonant, *jha*, is met with in the conjunct *jghi* in the Parbatiya plates.

The writing of the early tenth century in Assam is represented by the Nawgong grant¹⁷ issued in the 8th year of the reign of Balavarman who ruled in the end of the ninth and the beginning of the tenth century A.D. The alphabet of this period bears almost the same characteristics as that of the ninth century.

After Balavarmana the kings of Kamarupa perhaps did not issue grants at least for a century. After that we find two

¹⁷ K.S., pp. 71-88.

records of Ratnapala (A.D. 1010-A.D. 1040). His Baragao¹⁸ plates were issued in the 25th year and the Sualkuchi¹⁹ plates in the 26th year of his reign. Thus these two records fall in the first half of the eleventh century A.D. His successor was his grandson Indrapala who issued his Gauhati²⁰ grant in the eighth year and Guakuchi²¹ grant in the 21st year of his reign. Thus these two grants also fall in the middle of the eleventh century.

For our palaeographic study we have grouped these in two classes. The inscriptions of Ratnapala form one group and those of Indrapala the other. In this century we find that the alphabets have made a definite advancement over those of the previous century.

These letters retain the head-marks but there is a sort of embellishment in their formation. The *Kuṣiṭa* style of these letters is retained but almost all the letters leave a tail like formation at the bottom of the verticals. Probably this was the script which was referred to as *Gauri* (*Gauḍi*), the script of Eastern India, by Alberuni.

Among the vowels only *a*, *i*, *u*, and *e* are to be found. *A* is of the tailed variety in which the right vertical is extended further down. Its left lower curve is extended farther and the middle bar sloping to the right. *I* is formed by two circles with a double curve above. The lower tail of *u* is extended further upwards. It has a bead-mark also. The initial *e* is also of the tailed variety like other letters of this century.

The mode of attaching medial signs also has undergone certain changes. The *ā* medial is shown either by a full length *daṇḍa* to the right or coming only to the half way. The book type *ā* medial with an upward stroke seems to have been dropped hence afterwards. *I* and *ī* medials retain their old shapes. *E* medial is also shown by a further leftward extension of the head-mark with a curve at the end. Other medials such as *ai*, *o*, and *au* are made by the combination of these signs; but the second leftward medial of *ai* or *au* is formed by a beautiful flourish.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 88-109.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 110-115.

²⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 116-129.

The consonants developed in a normal way. Only the left curve of *na* is extended further downwards. The lower tip of *da* is also extended down. The loop of *na* is also in the process of change. The lower tip of the loop is being connected to with the upper stem thus forming a vertical. In the next century this develops into the Assamese *na*. The triangular foot mark of *ra* of the eighth century develops a tail in the ninth and tenth centuries and it is more marked in the present one. In the inscriptions of Ratnapala *sa* has a loop in its upper part and is joined by a bar to the right vertical. It has a foot mark in the left vertical. But in the grant of Indrapala its loop is opened and the top is bent thus eliminating the necessity of joining the right vertical with a bar.

The twelfth century is marked by a variety of epigraphs, in Assam. Dharmapala (A.D. 1095-A.D. 1120) issued his Khonāmukhī²² plates in the first year of his reign and his Subhāṅkarapāṭaka²³ plates were issued in his second year, while his Pushpabhadra²⁴ grant was issued about the end of his reign. Chronologically the first two grants will fall within the eleventh century A.D. and these can very well be compared with the Guākuchi grant of Indrapāla (only third plate illustrated in K.S.). This forms the group j of our classification of the epigraphs. The next is the Silimpur²⁵ stone inscription of Prahāsa of the time of Jayapāla. This is a very carefully written and engraved epigraph. 'A most interesting feature of this inscription is this it is almost free from spelling mistakes, due either to the ignorance of the scribe or the engraver which are so common in other stones and copper-plates found in Bengal and other parts of India.' The other inscriptions are, the Kamauli²⁶ grant of Vaidyadeva and, the Assam plates²⁷ of Vallabhadeva. All these epigraphs, belonging to the twelfth century A.D., have been selected for study.

There are certain difficulties experienced by the decipherers of these inscriptions which should be mentioned here. The first

²² *E.I.*, Vol. XXX, pp. 203-209.

²³ *K.S.*, pp. 146-67.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 168-84.

²⁵ *E.I.*, Vol. XIII, pp. 289-95.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 347-358.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. V, pp. 181-188.

and foremost difficulty is caused by the great similarity of the signs for some letters or negligible difference between some letters. Prof. Kielhorn, while editing the Assam plates of Vallabhadeva has felt such difficulty 'occasionally caused by the great similarity of two or even three different letters.' 'Thus it is not always easy,' he remarks, 'to distinguish between *b* and *v*, between *n* and *l*, between *ch* and *r*, *ch* and *v*, *v* and *dh*, or between the subscript *u* and *v*; and where letters like these happen to occur in proper name . . . it is impossible to vouch for the absolute correctness of the transcribed text.' The other difficulty is caused by different forms of the same letter in the same inscription.

Without indulging deep into the palaeographic peculiarities we will here enumerate general characteristics of these epigraphs. The inscriptions of Dharmapāla and Jayapāla can be grouped together because these show tail in the letters as we have seen in the alphabet of the preceding century. Again, these have triangular head-marks from the middle of which the letters emerge, e.g. *ka*, *ja*, *bha* etc. But in some cases the letters are attached to the right end of the triangle head-mark such as *cha*, *a*, *da*, *pa*, *ra* & *c*. This is of particular interest because in the Kamauli grant of Vaidyadeva it assumes the form of a hollow triangle head-mark. This feature is present in the Assam plates of Vallabhadeva where the letters like *ja*, *da*, *pha*, *bha* have this triangle open to the right.

Among the medial vowels *a*, *ā*, *i*, and *e* are found. In the Khonamukhi grant of Dharmapāla and the Kamanli grant of Vaidyadeva *ri* vowel is also found.

Ā medial sign is always in the form of a *danḍa* attached to the right except in *jā* in the Silimpur inscription. The *i* medial is attached to the left of the alphabet and, in the inscriptions of Dharmapāla it is curved while in others it is almost straight. Long *ī* is added to the right. *Ri* medial is in the form of a hook open to the right. In Assam plates this medial is a bit more ornamental. In Khonamukhi grant we find a long *ṛī* medial in the *ṭṛī*. The *e* medial in the first two groups is the same as in the previous century, i.e. a leftward extension of the head-mark, but in the Kamauli grant it is in the form of a short curved stroke at the left. In the Assam plates it is a full length curve

to the left of the alphabet resembling the short *i* medial in other inscriptions.

In these inscriptions, especially in the last two, the alphabets are more developed. These form a branch of Nagari alphabets from which the scripts of the mediaeval Kamarupa or Assam developed.

7th Century A.D.

Table III

	A		Ā		I		ī		U		ū		Ṛ	
	c	d	c	d	c	d	c	d	c	d	c	a	c	d
	𑒠	𑒡	𑒢	𑒣	𑒤	𑒥			𑒦	𑒧				
KA	𑒛	𑒜	𑒝	𑒞			𑒟	𑒠	𑒡	𑒢			𑒣	𑒤
KHA	𑒥	𑒦	𑒧	𑒨		𑒩	𑒪	𑒫						
GA		𑒬	𑒭	𑒮			𑒯	𑒰	𑒱	𑒲				
GHA	𑒳		𑒴		𑒵				𑒶					
ṆA														
CHA	𑒷	𑒸	𑒹		𑒺	𑒻			𑒼					
CHHA														
JA	𑒽	𑒾	𑒿		𑓀	𑓁		𑓂						
JHA														
ṆA														
TA	𑓃	𑓄	𑓅	𑓆				𑓇	𑓈	𑓉				
THA														
DA			𑓊						𑓋					
DHA		𑓌												
ṆA	𑓍	𑓎	𑓏	𑓐		𑓑		𑓒						
TA	𑓓	𑓔	𑓕	𑓖	𑓗	𑓘	𑓙	𑓚	𑓛	𑓜			𑓝	

7th Century A.D.

Table IV

	A		Ā		I		Ī		U		Ū		R	
	c	d	c	d	c	d	c	d	c	d	c	d	c	d
THA	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ			ṭ		ṭ					
DA	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ		ṭ				ṭ	ṭ			ṭ	ṭ
DHA	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ			ṭ	ṭ
NA	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ		ṭ	ṭ			ṭ	ṭ
PA	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ				ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	
PHA	ṭ	ṭ												
BA	ṭ								ṭ				ṭ	
BHA	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ			ṭ		ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ
MA	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ		ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ
YA	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ				
RA	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ		
LA	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ		ṭ					
VA	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ					ṭ	ṭ
SA	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ		ṭ	ṭ				
SHA	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ		ṭ	ṭ			ṭ	ṭ				
SA	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ		ṭ		ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ		
HA	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ						ṭ	ṭ

7th Century A.D.

Table V

	E		AI		O		AU		LIGATURES					
	c	d	c	d	c	d	c	d	c	d	c	d	c	d
KA		କ	କ		କ	କ	କ	କ	କ	କ	କ	କ	କ	କ
KHA									କ	କ	କ			
GA					ଗ	ଗ			ଗ		ଗ	ଗ	ଗ	-
GHA					ଘ									
ŃA									ଙ	ଙ	ଙ	ଙ	ଙ	ଙ
CHA									ଚ	ଚ	ଚ	ଚ	ଚ	
CHHA														
JA	ଜ		ଜ		ଜ				ଜ	ଜ	ଜ	ଜ	ଜ	ଜ
JHA									ଜ					
ÑA									ଞ	ଞ	ଞ			
TA									ଟ					
THA														
DA														
DHA									ଢ					
NA	ନ		ନ		ନ				ନ	ନ		ନ		ନ
TA	ତ	ତ	ତ	ତ	ତ	ତ	ତ		ତ	ତ	ତ	ତ	ତ	ତ

7th Century A.D.

Table VI

	E		AI		O		AU		LIGATURES					
	c	d	c	d	c	d	c	d	c	d	c	d	c	d
THA	ਥੇ				ਠੇ				ਠ੍ਠੇ	ਠ੍ਠੇ		ਠ੍ਠੇ		
DA	ਦੇ	ਦੇ			ਠੇ	ਠੇ	ਠੇ		ਠ੍ਠੇ	ਠ੍ਠੇ	ਠ੍ਠੇ	ਠ੍ਠੇ	ਠ੍ਠੇ	ਠ੍ਠੇ
DHA		ਠੇ		ਠੇ						ਠੇ				
NA	ਨੇ	ਨੇ		ਨੇ	ਨੇ				ਨ੍ਠੇ	ਨ੍ਠੇ	ਨ੍ਠੇ	ਨ੍ਠੇ		ਨ੍ਠੇ
PA					ਪੇ	ਪੇ	ਪੇ		ਪ੍ਠੇ	ਪ੍ਠੇ	ਪ੍ਠੇ	ਪ੍ਠੇ	ਪ੍ਠੇ	
PHA														
BA														
BHA					ਧੇ	ਧੇ	ਧੇ			ਧੇ				
MA	ਮੇ	ਮੇ			ਮੇ	ਮੇ				ਮ੍ਠੇ	ਮ੍ਠੇ	ਮ੍ਠੇ		ਮ੍ਠੇ
YA	ਯੇ	ਯੇ	ਯੇ		ਯੇ	ਯੇ			ਯ੍ਠੇ					
RA	ਰੇ	ਰੇ		ਰੇ	ਰੇ	ਰੇ			ਰ੍ਠੇ	ਰ੍ਠੇ	ਰ੍ਠੇ	ਰ੍ਠੇ	ਰ੍ਠੇ	ਰ੍ਠੇ
LA	ਲੇ	ਲੇ	ਲੇ		ਲੇ	ਲੇ	ਲੇ		ਲ੍ਠੇ	ਲ੍ਠੇ		ਲੇ		
VA		ਵੇ				ਵੇ			ਵ੍ਠੇ	ਵ੍ਠੇ		ਵੇ		ਵੇ
SA	ਸੇ		ਸੇ					ਸੇ	ਸ੍ਠੇ	ਸ੍ਠੇ	ਸ੍ਠੇ	ਸ੍ਠੇ		ਸ੍ਠੇ
SHA	ਸ਼ੇ			ਸ਼ੇ					ਸ਼੍ਠੇ	ਸ਼੍ਠੇ	ਸ਼੍ਠੇ	ਸ਼੍ਠੇ	ਸ਼੍ਠੇ	
SA				ਸ਼ੇ	ਸ਼ੇ	ਸ਼ੇ	ਸ਼ੇ		ਸ਼੍ਠੇ	ਸ਼੍ਠੇ	ਸ਼੍ਠੇ	ਸ਼੍ਠੇ	ਸ਼੍ਠੇ	ਸ਼੍ਠੇ
HA	ਹੇ	ਹੇ			ਹੇ				ਹ੍ਠੇ	ਹ੍ਠੇ	ਹ੍ਠੇ			



9th Century A.D.

Table VII

	A		Ā		I		Ī		U		Ū		R	
	e	f	e	f	e	f	e	f	e	f	e	f	e	f
		𑒀				𑒁				𑒂				
KA	𑒃	𑒄		𑒅	𑒆			𑒇	𑒈	𑒉		𑒊		𑒋
KHA		𑒌				𑒍								
GA	𑒎	𑒏		𑒐				𑒑		𑒒		𑒓		𑒔
GHA		𑒕		𑒖										
ŊA														
CHA	𑒗	𑒘				𑒙				𑒚				
CHHA														
JA	𑒛	𑒜		𑒝				𑒞						
JHA														
ŅA														
TA	𑒟	𑒠		𑒡		𑒢		𑒣						
THA		𑒤		𑒥										
DA		𑒦		𑒧										
DHA		𑒨												
NA		𑒩	𑒪	𑒫		𑒬								
TA	𑒭	𑒮		𑒯	𑒰	𑒱				𑒲				𑒳

9th Century A.D.

Table VIII

	A		Ā		I		Ī		U		Ū		Ṛ	
	e	f	e	f	e	f	e	f	e	f	e	f	e	f
THA		ष	था	षा			षी		प					
DA	द	द	दा	दा	दि		दी		दु				रु	
DHA		व	वा	वा	वि	वि	वी	वः	व	व		प्र		
NA		न	ना	ना	नि	न	नी	नू	नु				क	क
PA	प	प	पा	पा	पि		पी	प	प		प्र		मु	
PHA											प्र			
BA														
BHA	भ	भ			भि		भी		भु		प्र		रु	
MA	म	म	मा	मा	मि				मु				रु	
YA	य	य		या	यि						प्र			
RA	र	र	रा	रा	रि		री		रु	रु				
LA	ल	ल		ला	लि	ली			लु					
VA	व	व	वा	वा	वि	वि	वी						रु	
ŚA		श			शि						प्र		रु	
SHA		ष		षा			षी				प्र			
SA	स	स		सा	सि		सी			सु	सु		रु	
HA	ह	ह	हा	हा	हि	हि	ही		हु				रु	

9th Century A.D.

Table IX

	E		AI		O		AU		LIGATURES					
	e	f	e	f	e	f	e	f	e	f	e	f	e	f
		৩							৪					
KA		ক	কৈ	কা	কা				ক	কৈ	কা		কা	কা
KHA			খৈ						খ	খৈ	খা			
GA		গ	গৈ	গা			গা		গ					
GHA			ঘৈ											
ŃA									ক		ক			
ĈHA									খ		খ			
CHHA														
JA							জ		জ		জ		জ	জ
JHA														
ÑA									জ		জ			
TA						ত			ত	ত				
THA														
DA				দৈ										
DHA				দৈ										
NA		ন							ন		ন			
TA	ত	ত		ত	তা	তা		ত	ত	তৈ	ত	ত	ত	ত

9th Century A.D.

Table X

	E		AI		O		AU		LIGATURES					
	e	f	e	f	e	f	e	f	e	f	e	f	e	f
THA											॥		॥	
DA	र	द					दो		द		द		द	
DHA		दा							दा	दा				
NA				नै	क	भा			नू	नूः	नू	नू		
PA				पै	पा				प्रा		प्रा			
PHA														
BA														
BHA														
MA	य			मै	म	भा			मू					
YA	य	य		यै		या								
RA		र			रा	रा			रा	रा		र		
LA		ल		लैः	ला	ल								
VA		व		वै	वा				वा		वा			
SA		श			शा				शा	शा	शा	शा	शा	
SHA		श							श		श			
SA					सा		सा	सा	सा	सा	सा	सा	सा	सा
HA		ह			हा				हा					

10th Century A.D.

Table XI

[illegible]

11th Century A.D.

Table XIII

	A		Ā		I		Ī		U		Ū		Ṛ	
	ह	ि	ह	ि	ह	ि	ह	ि	ह	ि	ह	ि	ह	ि
		अ				इ				उ				
KA	क	का	का	का	किं		की	की				रू	क	
KHA	ख	ख			खि		खी							
GA	ग	ग				(ग)	गी		गू					
GHA	घ	घ												
ṆA														
CHA	च	च			चि									
CHHA														
JA	ज	ज			जि	जि	जी							
JHA														
ṆA														
TA	ट													
THA														
DA				दा										
DHA														
NA	न	न	ना	ना	नि		नी	नी						
TA	त	त	ता		ति	ति	ती		तुः	तु				

11th Century A.D.

Table XIV

	A		Ā		I		Ī		U		Ū		R	
	ह	ि	ह	ि	ह	ि	ह	ि	ह	ि	ह	ि	ह	ि
THA	थ	थ							थ					
DA	द	द		दा		दि		दी						
DHA	ध	ध	दा		दि	लि	दी		दू		दू	दू		
NA	न	न	ना	न	(न	नि	नी	नी		न				
PA	प	प	पा	पा					पू	पू		पू	पू	पू
PHA														
BA														
BHA	भ	भ	भा	भा	भि	भि	भी	भी	भू	भू	भू	भू		
MA	म	म	मा	मा		मि			मू		मू	मू		मू
YA	य	य	या	या	यि				यू					
RA	र	र	रा	रा		रि		री	रू	रू				
LA	ल	ल		ला		लि		ली	लू					
VA	व	व		वा	वि	वि	वी						वू	वू
ŚA	श	श				शि	शी			शू				
SHA	ष	षः			षि									
SA	स	स		सा		सि	सी	सी	सू	सू	सू			
HA	ह	ह	हा	हा	हि	हि								

11th Century A.D.

Table XV

	E		AI		O		AU		LIGATURES					
	h	i	h	i	h	i	h	i	h	i	h	i	h	i
		३								॥		३	३	३
KA	क	क			क				क	क	क	क	क	क
KHA	ख								ख					ख
GA							ग	ग	ग	ग	ग	ग		
GHA			घ				घ							
NA									न	न	न	न		
CHA									च	च		च		
CHHA									च	च		च		
JA					ज				ज	ज	ज	ज		
JHA														
NA									न					
TA									त					
THA														
DA														
DHA	ड													
NA					न		न		न	न		न		
TA	त	त	त		त				त	त	त	त	त	त

Table XVII

	A				Ā				I				ī			
	ṛ	ṝ	ḷ	ḹ	ṛ	ṝ	ḷ	ḹ	ṛ	ṝ	ḷ	ḹ	ṛ	ṝ	ḷ	ḹ
	अ		अ	अ	आ	आ	आ	आ	इ	इ	इ	इ	ई	ई	ई	ई
KA	क	क	क	क	का	का	का	का					कि	का	की	की
KHA	ख	ख		ख	खा	खा			खि	खि						
GA	ग	ग	ग	ग	गा				गि	गि			गि	गी	गी	गी
GHA			घ		घा	घा	घा									
ṆA																
CHA	च	च	च	च	चा	चा		चा	चि	चि	चि	चि	चि	ची		
CHHA																
JA	ज	ज	ज	ज	जा	जा	जा	जा	जि	जि			जि	जी	जी	जी
JHA			झ					झा								
ÑA																
TA	ट	ट	ट	ट			ता	टा			ति			ती	ती	ती
THA					ठा							ति				
DA					दा	दा	दा									दी
DHA											दि					
ṆA	ल	ल	ल	ल	ला	ला	ला		लि	लि	लि	लि		ली	ली	
TA	त	त	त	त	ता	ता	ता	ता	ति	ति	ति	ति	ती	ती	ती	ती

12th Century A.D.

Table XIX

	U				Ū				R				E			
	ṣ	k	l	m	ṣ	k	l	m	ṣ	k	l	m	ṣ	k	l	m
	उ	ऊ		ऌ					ऋ		ॠ		ॡ	ॢ	ॣ	।
KA	क	ख	ग	घ					च	छ	ज	झ		ट	ठ	ड
KHA													ण	श		स
GA	इ	उ		ऋ					ॠ						ॡ	ॢ
GHA									ॣ			।				
ṆA																
CHA	॥	॥														
CHHA																
JA			॥							॥		॥				
JHA																
ṆA																
TA					॥	॥										
ṬHA																
DA															॥	॥
ḌHA																
ṆA								॥					॥			॥
TA	॥	॥		॥					॥				॥	॥	॥	॥

12th Century A.D.

Table XX

	U				Ū				R				E			
	j	k	l	m	j	k	l	m	j	k	l	m	j	k	l	m
THA														४		
DA	ॡ	ॢ	ॣ							॥	०	ॡ	ॢ	ॣ	।	॥
DHA	ॠ			ॡ	ॢ	ॣ		।		॥	०	ॡ	ॢ	ॣ	।	
NA		ॠ	ॡ	ॢ	ॣ	।	॥		ॠ	ॡ	ॢ	ॣ		ॠ		ॡ
PA	ॡ	ॢ	ॣ	।		ॡ	ॢ	ॣ	।	॥			ॡ			
PHA													ॡ			
BA																
BHA	ॠ	ॡ		ॢ	ॣ	।	॥		ॠ		ॢ		ॠ		ॡ	ॢ
MA	ॠ	ॡ	ॢ	ॣ		।				॥		ॠ	ॡ	ॢ	ॣ	।
YA	ॡ		ॢ	ॣ									ॡ	ॢ		ॣ
RA	ॠ	ॡ	ॢ	ॣ	।	॥	०						ॠ	ॡ	ॢ	ॣ
LA		ॠ		ॢ			ॣ						ॠ	ॡ		ॢ
VA		ॠ					ॣ	।	॥				ॠ		ॡ	
ŚA		ॠ	ॡ	ॢ						॥		ॠ	ॡ		ॢ	
SHA	ॡ	ॢ	ॣ	।												
SA	ॠ	ॡ	ॢ	ॣ		।			ॠ							
HA	ॠ	ॡ		ॢ					ॠ					ॠ	ॡ	

12th Century A.D.

Table XXI

[illegible]

12th Century A.D.

Table XXII

	AI				O				AU				AM			
	j	k	l	m	j	k	l	m	j	k	l	m	j	k	l	m
THA		ठि			छ											
DA												ढि				
DHA						झ						ढि				
NA		न	न		न	न		न	न		न					
PA			प	प	प	प	प			प	प	प				
PHA																
BA																
BHA						झ					झ					
MA	म			म	म	म	म	म	म	म			म		म	म
YA		य			य	य		य						य	य	य
RA		र			र	र	र	र	र	र	र	र				
LA		ल	ल		ल	ल	ल	ल			ल		ल		ल	ल
VA		व	व	व	व		व	व						व		
SA	स				स		स		स			स				
SHA			स										स			
HA		ह				ह	ह						ह		ह	ह

Table XXIII

[illegible]

APPENDIX

Questions & Answers :

Question 1 : Chinese script is supposed to have been in use 4000 years ago. Did it have no relation with the use of script in India or did it not find any place in Indian Palaeography ?

Answer : The Chinese script is one of the oldest scripts of the ancient world. It has its place in the history of the development of the world scripts. Its development stopped at the Ideographic stage and it has got several thousands of symbols. As regards its relation with the Indian scripts, a Chinese encyclopaedia, Fa-Wan-Shu-Lin (668 A.D.) states that there were three scripts originated by three divine teachers. The best of these was Brāhmī, devised by Brahma, which runs from left to right ; the second was Kharoshthi which runs from right to left. The scripts of least importance was devised by Tsan-Ki who was born in China and this script runs from up to down. It is also stated there that while Brahmā and Kharoshthi got their scripts from heaven Tsan-Ki devised his script from the signs got from the legs of birds etc. Thus the Chinese scripts has got no relation with the Brāhmī script of India. Moreover, it should be pointed out that there were at least four different points in the world where scripts originated, almost independantly. In Egypt hyrogliphic and its derivatives appeared in about the middle of fourth millenium B.C. The second point was somewhere in the valley of Euphrates and Tigris and the modern European alphabet descended from this. The third point was in China and it developed independent scripts of its own which stopped at the Ideographic stage. The fourth point was in India which developed its own scripts, almost independently of these scripts.

Question 2 : In the modern period the scripts of both Assamese and Bengali languages are the same with slightest variations in the letter *ra* and *ba* with an additional Assamese

letter *va*. In some of the old Bengali literature *ra* and *va* are also found. Again in the modern Maithili Assamese form of *ra* is used. Could you kindly clarify whether these scripts are the same and the variation is a later development.

MR. L. BHARALI

Answer : Historically speaking Bengali, Assamese and Maithili are sister scripts and although they had their independent traditions of development they were considerably influenced with each other. Although there is a *va* letter in Assamese scripts but it was devised later on perhaps in the 14th-15th centuries A.D. From the close of the 6th centuries A.D. letter *ba* was dropped in Bengal. In Assam also we find the letter *ba* for the last time in the Dubi Copper plates of Bhaskaravarman and also in the Khaoikargaon stone inscription, recently published by Prof. P. C. Choudhury in Journal of Assam Research Society. This inscription also can be attributed to the same period.

Question 3 : How can you say that there must have been some scripts in Vedic period while there is no positive evidence for it in the Vedic literature itself ?

MR. P. KAKATI

Answer : We must accept that there is no positive evidence for the existence of a Vedic script but in the Vedic literature there are positive references for writing as well as for the manuscript of the Veda. These are the as follows : In the *Aitareya Āraṇyaka*, V. 5.31 : of Keith, Edition 1909 page 158 definite reference to writing is to be found. The relevant portion runs as follows :

नावदृश्यो न प्रतिदृश्यो अधीयीत, न मांसं भुक्त्वा न कोहितं
दद्यात्, न खजमपितृभ्यः, नोहिरिष्य, नावलिरिष्य ॥

Translation :

"The pupil should not learn while leaning backward or forward, nor after eating flesh, nor after seeing blood, nor after putting on garlands, nor after writing, nor after obliterating writing."

Here the root *likh* should be noted. On this passage A.B. Kieth remarks, "Writing on palm leaves may be meant rather than on wood." Page 301, fn. 9.

Similarly, in the Atharveda, Kāṇḍ 19, Sūtra 72, we find the following verse :

यस्मा॒कोशा॒दु द॒भराम॒ वेदं॒ तस्मिन्मन्त्र॑रव दध्य॒ पनम् ।

कृत॒ मिष्टं॒ ब्रह्म॑णो वीर्ये॒ऽण तेन॒ मा देवा॑स्त॒ पसाव॑तेह ॥१॥

अ० वे० काण्ड १८, सूत्र ७२ ॥

Translation :

"Now I keep down the Veda (or now I keep it) in the box from which I had taken it out."

This clearly refers to the manuscript of the Veda. The religious manuscripts were wrapped up in a 'piece of cloth or enclosed in a wooden box. These boxes were again coloured and painted with the pictures appropriate to the subject matter of the book itself. In Assam the manuscript sacred to the Manasādevī, the Goddess of snake dealing with adventure of Behula and of the miracles of the Goddess were wrapped in cohra skin.

Question 4 : Is there any evidence to show that Indian languages had picture writing or Ideograph ?

MR. B. K. BHATTACHARYA

Answer : We have Indus-Valley script which is a transitional script, that is to say, an Ideographic script with phonetic elements. But so far its language could not be determined with any degree of certainty. Therefore, it is not possible to comment anything about it in the present state of our knowledge.

Question 5 : It is said that all Indian scripts and some south Indian scripts originated from Brāhmī. What are the factors, that account for their present differences ? How did the differentiation occur ? Among the tribes of North-Eastern India there is a belief that they had their scripts but somehow

they have lost it. Does it mean that Brāhmī script replaced the local scripts that might have existed? Is it possible to prove that the present Indian scripts are similar or originated from a common source?

MR. B. K. BHATTACHARYA

Answer : Yes, it is possible and it has been established that all the scripts of India and several scripts of South-East Asia have developed from the Brāhmī script of Aśoka. There is no doubt about it. As regards the outer formal differences in the shapes of the individual letters it can be attributed to the writing habit of the individuals and the use of writing materials such as palm leaves or birch bark or paper or metal plates etc. It is also influenced by the type of the pen or the stylus used for writing.

As regards the tradition of forgetting the use of a script by the tribes of North Eastern India there must be some truth. But the nature of such scripts cannot be determined. These may have some affiliation with the original tribes from which they have come. As regards the Ahom script it is an off-shoot of Indian Brāhmī scripts which came via Ceylon and Burma.

Question 6 : Was 'Vindu' a letter? Was it ever used as a punctuation mark in Indian languages?

MR. B. K. BHATTACHARYA

Question 7 : What are your views regarding the original use of the *Vindu*? We find *vindus* in Arabic (semitic), Roman and other scripts also. Is the Indian *vindu* an Indian invention or was it borrowed or did it migrate to the West from India?

PROF. S. A. MALLIK

Answer : As regards the migration of *vindu* from East to West or from West to East it is difficult to determine. As we have seen in our first lecture the Brāhmī script was invented out of simple geometrical signs. Indian *varṇamālā* was ready by that time so there can be no monopoly on these simple geometrical signs of any nation for the invention of a writing

system. In Indian scripts a *vindu* has always denoted an *anusvāra* i.e. a nasal sound. However, in early Brāhmī script some earlier scholars have read four dots as long *ī* letter but in all the contexts this letter should be read as *im*. A dot, so far as I know, has never been used as a punctuation mark.

Question 8 : What is the source of the *anji* which we find in most of inscriptions particularly, the copper-plate inscriptions of ancient Assam ?

DR. CHUTIA

Answer : This symbol is not particular to the copper-plate inscriptions of Assam only but it is found as an auspicious symbol in the beginning of most of the inscriptions of India. Sometimes it is read as *Om*, and also as *Sidham*. Sometimes it is folowed by the letters *swasti* as in the Sungalgāon plates of King Vidagdha from Chamba (Vogel, *Ancient Chamba State*, plate 17). Sometimes it is followed by the letter *Om Namah Śivāya* (Kota inscription of Śivagana, *E.I.* Vol. XIX, p. 58). In some instances of 12th century inscriptions it is followed by the letter *Om* (Kamauli inscription of Vaidyadeva, a king of Kamrup) *E.I.* Vol. II, pp. 350-353. Not only that, such symbols are found in Buddhist inscriptions of India and S. E. Asia. As regards its prevalent name *anji* in Assam, it might have been derived from the word *Om* with a suffix *ji*.

Question 9 : One scholar, Mr. Samasastry, attempted to show that the alphabets of Brāhmī scripts originated from the Hindu *Tantra* itself. Does this view possess some scientific basis ?

PROF. NAGEN SAIKIA

Answer : Mr. R. Samasastry attempted to derive the *Nāgarī* alphabets (as he calls the Brāhmī alphabets) from the *Tāntric* symbols. Although there is some force in his arguments but the *tāntric* works which he quotes are quite later and cannot form the basis for derivation of an earlier script. However, at present no one accepts his view.

Question 10 : According to you, before the Brāhmī script attained its complete form there were some local or regional

scripts. Which were they? On which particular local script the Brāhmī script is based?

MR. LOKNATH BHARALI

Answer : I am afraid I have been misunderstood. Although there are references to several scripts at the time of the inception of the Brāhmī script but none of these have come to us, therefore it is difficult to ascertain about the question of the script from which Brāhmī can be supposed to have originated. However, the Indian *Varṇamālā* can be regarded as a common factor in all such scripts.

Question 11 : As you told, Buddha revolted not only in the matter of language, but also in the matter of script. As such, what reformation had been made in the current Brāhmī script? Is it for simplicity of identification or for better expression?

MR. LOKNATH BHARALI

Answer : Again, I feel I have been misunderstood. It is true that Buddha permitted his disciples to hear about his teachings in their own languages but he never talked about the script. It is the circumstantial evidences from which I have inferred that the Brāhmī of Aśoka might have been invented by some enthusiastic Buddhist to record the teachings of the Buddha. Therefore, the question of reformation for simplicity of identification or better expression does not arise. It must have been inspired by the urgency of the need.

Question 12 : Apart from the writing tool, what else have influenced the form of letters?— say sound system or aesthetic sense of the people i.e. the cultural development.

PROF. JOSODA BHARALI

Answer : I have discussed this matter in some detail in my previous lecture. In short we can say that the writing tool, the base material on which the script is written, and, the teacher-taught tradition influences the form of the letter.

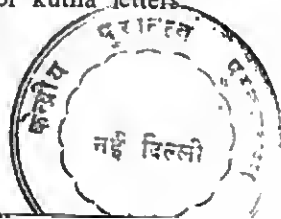
Question 13 : How is the sound of a letter determined ?

PROF. JOSODA BHARALI

Answer : All the writing systems are arbitrary in determining the symbol for the sound of the letter. The writing is said to be a graphic counterpart of the spoken language but the determination of the sound of a letter is almost arbitrary having no connection with the written symbol. But however, in the early history of writing systems it has got some connection with the picture writing. The Roman letter A is called *alpha* in Greek which was borrowed from the semitic letter *aleph* meaning ox. This originally resembled the head of an ox and was used for the first sound of the word *aleph*. Similarly the letter B is derived from the Greek Beta which came from the semitic beth meaning a house. Thus the sound of alphabetic letters is mostly determined by the first sound of the word used for the picture. But in Indian system the case was quite different. Indian grammarians had done very minute and advanced research in the field of phonetics of their language and they very scientifically had classified their alphabets. They divide the words into syllables and the syllables into the *aksharas*. The word *akshara* means something which cannot be further divided. नक्षरन्ति इत्यक्षराणि ।

Question 14 : Regarding head-marks you have not mentioned any thing about the *Siddhamātrikā*. May I know if *Siddhamātrikā* has contributed any thing for the head-marks ?

Answer : I have talked about this word in my third lecture. But the exact meaning and nature of this word is not certain. Alberuni mentions that a script named *Siddhamātrikā* was used in Kashmir and in Benaras. (in about 1030 A.D.) Buhler observes that "If the usual writing of Benaras resembled that of Kashmir, it cannot have had the long horizontal top-strokes which always characterise the Nāgarī, Berūni's note is, however, too brief and vague for a definite settlement of the question." (I.P., p. 68.) However Buhler has identified this with the acute-angled or kutila letters.





CATALOGUE.

Script - Assam

Assam - Script

"A book that is shut is but a block"

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